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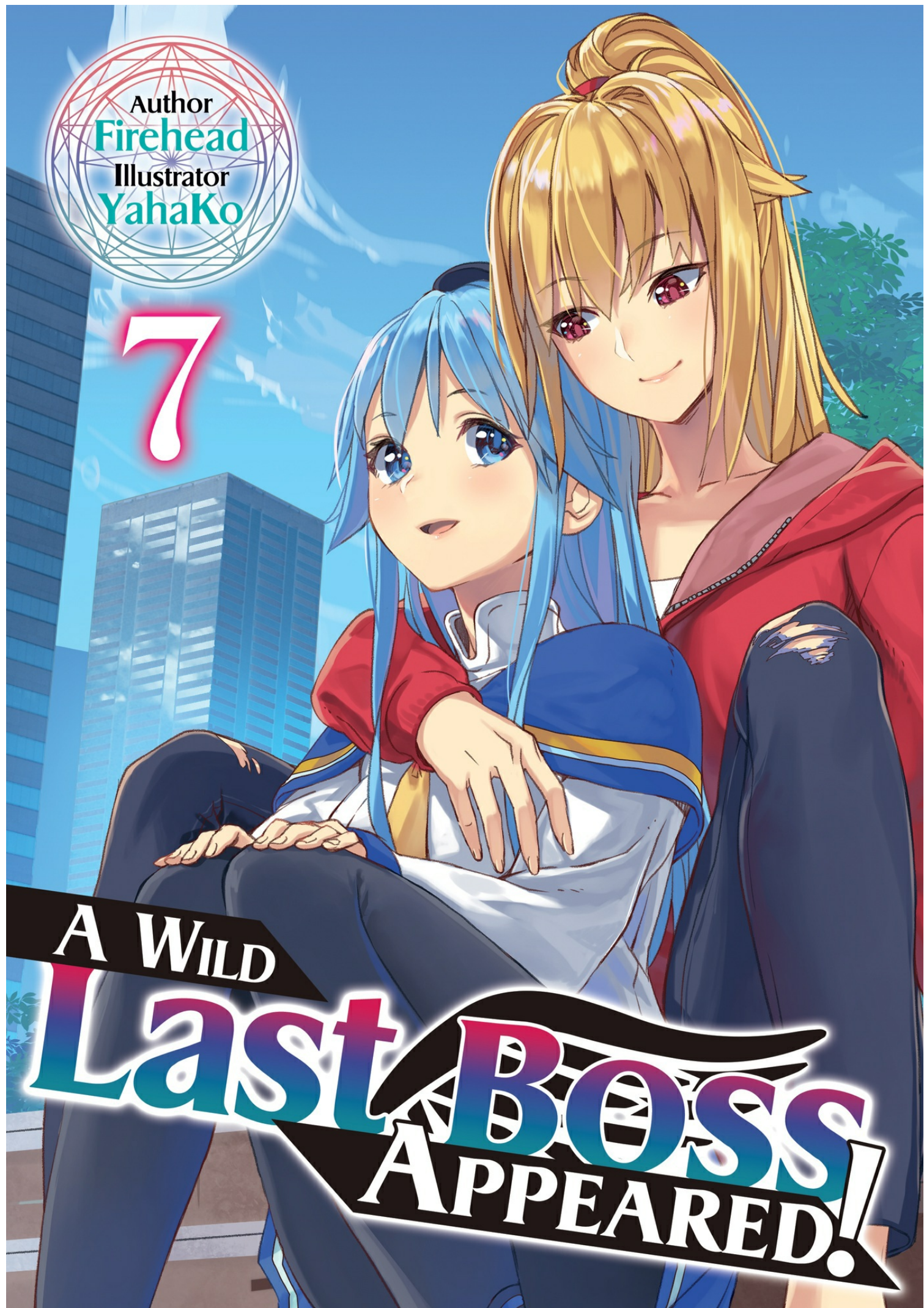
A WILD
Last BOSS
APPEARED!





Author
Firehead
Illustrator
YahaKo

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A WILD
Last BOSS
APPEARED!



A Wild
Last Boss
Appeared!

Illustrator: YahaKo



"My name
isn't **Eros!**
It's **Pisces,**
you idiots!"

"Is the pervert
narcissist Eros
home?"

"What
bad taste,
as always."

“I am one of the Conquering
Thirteen Heavenly Stars:
Ophiuchus the Snake Charmer.
That is the name you gave me.”





Character Introduction

In disguise

Me ♂

The player behind Lufas in the MMORPG *Exgate Online*. After being told by the Goddess of Creation, Alovenus, "I will give you a new role," he was immediately whisked away to the game world, possessing his character's body.

Lufas Maphaahl

The woman who almost managed to take over the world, feared as the "Black-Winged Conqueror." She was sealed 200 years ago, but due to a turn of events, she was revived and is now on a journey to reunite with her old friends, the Seven heroes, as well as her loyal retainers, the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars.



♊ Virgo



♄ Aigokeros



♎ libra



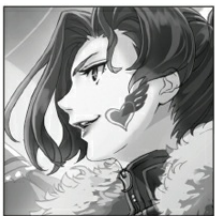
♈ Aries



♐ Sagittarius



♊ Castor



♏ scorpis



♋ Karkinos

The Conquering
Twelve Heavenly Stars



Terra

The son of the Devil King. He is working to free the devilfolk from the role given to them by the Goddess.



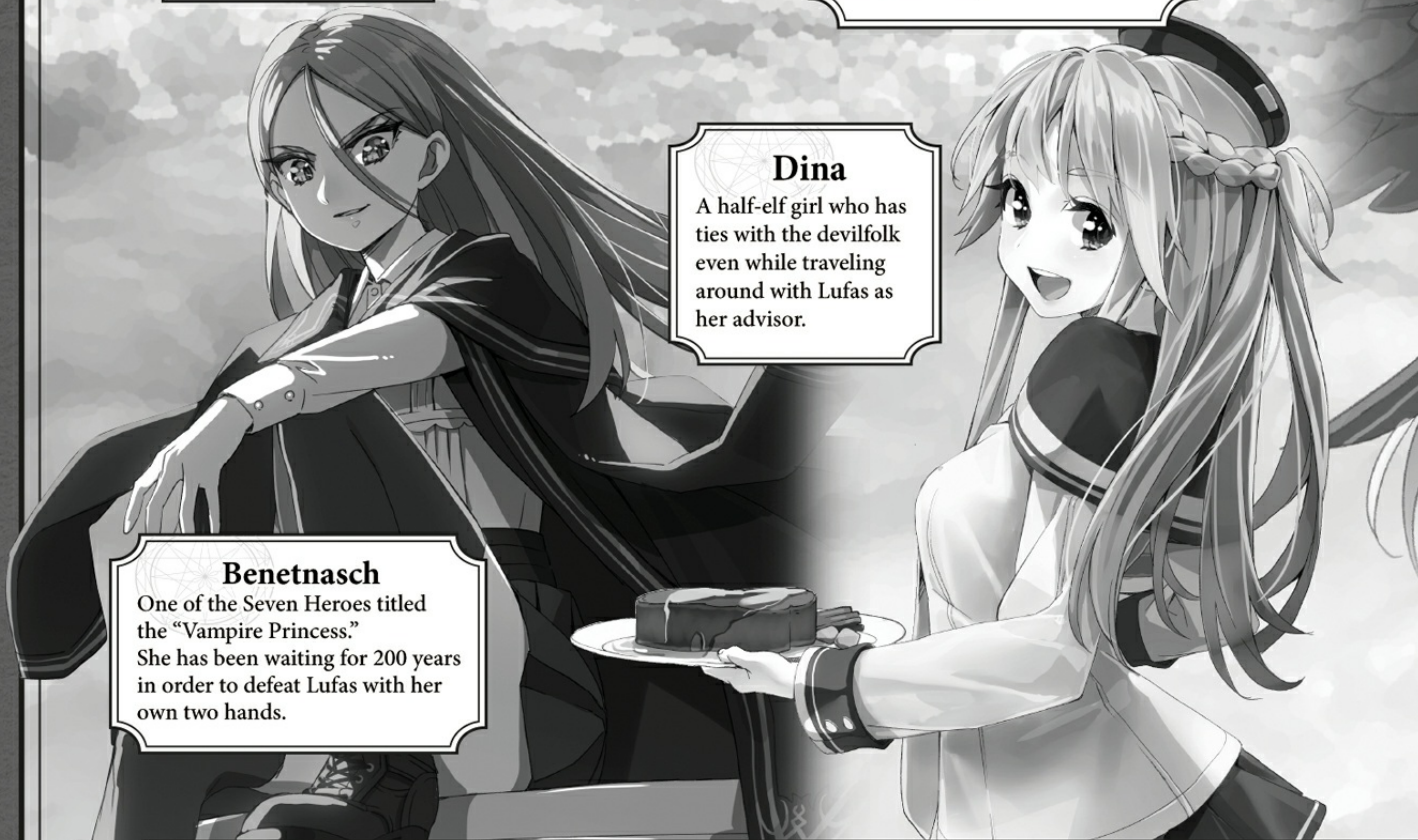
Luna

A devilfolk girl who follows Terra. Her element is Moon.



Minamijuuji Sei

The hero who was summoned from modern Japan. He is a completely normal young man, except for the fact that he is very serious and has a strong sense of justice.



Dina

A half-elf girl who has ties with the devilfolk even while traveling around with Lufas as her advisor.

Benetnasch

One of the Seven Heroes titled the "Vampire Princess." She has been waiting for 200 years in order to defeat Lufas with her own two hands.



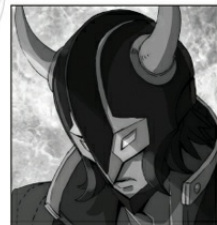
Lion King Leon

A Nemean Lion who was once part of the Twelve Stars as the "Lion." After his defeat at the hands of Aries and the others, he left without rejoining the Twelve Stars.



Pollux of the Twins

A member of the Twelve Heavenly Stars and Castor's little sister. She is the princess of fairies who is also an agent of the Goddess.



Taurus

STORY RECAP:

In order to meet up with the other half of the Twins, the Fairy Princess Pollux, I, possessing my game character Lufas Maphaahl, headed for the Fairy paradise of Alfheim.

However, when we stopped by a town on the way there, we ran across Terra and Luna of the devilfolk's Seven Luminaries as they were trying to escape from the attacks of a Goddess-possessed Pollux.

According to them, they were there to learn how to create avatars in an attempt to free the devilfolk from their Goddess-ordained role when the Goddess learned of their betrayal and decided to possess Pollux in order to erase the two of them.

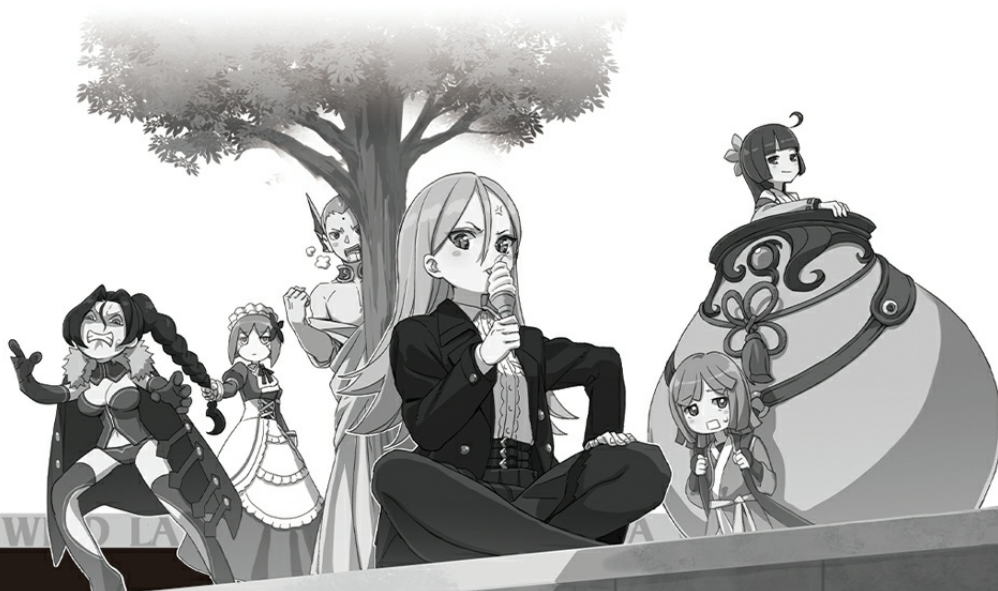
Luna begged me to at least spare Terra, who was unconscious, even as the Goddess closed in on them, intent on mercilessly eliminating the two. Normally, the devilfolk should have been my enemy, but I decided to help.

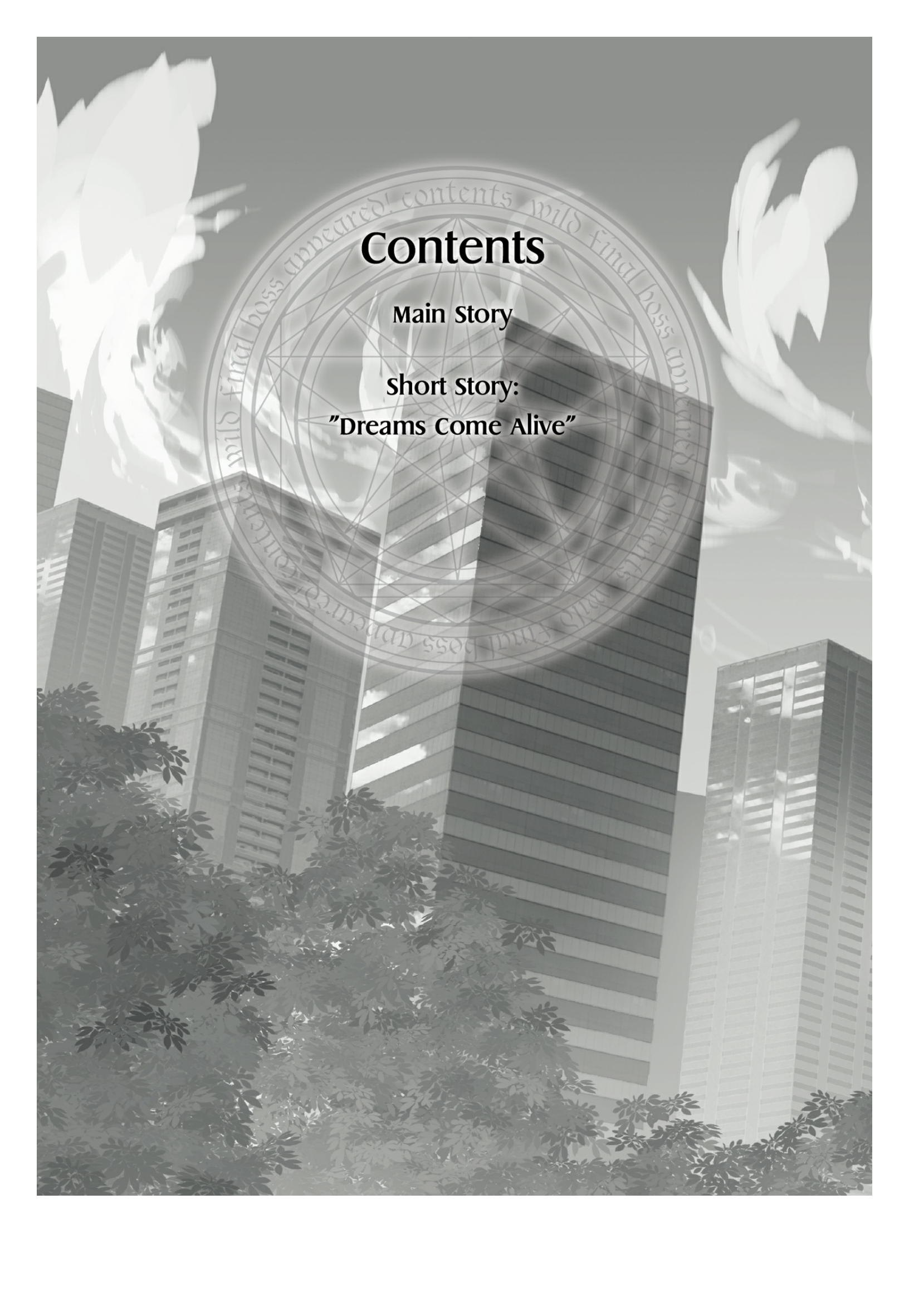
Having unlocked my true power, I made short work of the elites that the Goddess in Pollux's body had summoned. However, she summoned the spirits of the Seven Heroes next. Their unexpected appearance dulled my blade, but that was when a certain someone intervened.

It was the Vampire Princess Benetnasch. Though we'd fought to the death in Mjolnir, she decided to lend me a hand. Along with help from Taurus the Ox, we succeeded in driving the Goddess from Pollux's body.

With that, we managed to welcome Pollux back into the fold, and she immediately identified Dina as the Goddess's avatar.

Now it's time to retrieve the rest of the Twelve Heavenly Stars as well as find Dina, who disappeared as soon as she was suspected of being the Goddess.





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Voyages tended to be exciting at first, but as soon as you got used to the novelty, you ended up with too much time on your hands and thus became bored. That held true for voyages through the sky as well.

Now that we'd successfully returned Pollux—who had been possessed by the Goddess—to her senses, our next task had us riding on the *Argo*, a flying ship, in order to retrieve the remaining members of the Twelve Heavenly Stars as well as to search for Dina. This task currently had us in the skies over what humanity called the dark continent, since it was outside their sphere of habitation.

At this point, there were four things left to do. First: retrieve Aquarius the Water Bearer. This was Aries, Scorpius, and Karkinos's job. They would also be accompanied by Fenix and Hydras, who were argonautai summoned by Pollux.

Second: retrieve Pisces the Fish. This would be left to Libra, Aigokeros, and Sagittarius.

Third: find a way to release the devilfolk from their fate as one of the Goddess's spells. Of course, Pollux was needed for this one. Terra and Luna would be going with her as assistants, and Virgo would also be tagging along.

Lastly: find Dina, who had gone missing. I would be taking on this task, and Benet would be coming with me as well for some reason. Because of this, we'd spent about three hours zipping around the dark continent.

My interest was drawn by Libra saying, "I see it," so I brought myself up to the deck. When I arrived, I found the other members all gathered, their eyes wide upon seeing Muspelheim.

Yes, we were in Muspelheim, the land where an ouroboros was currently sealed. It was a place where mana had somehow turned into fire and never returned to its original form, creating a land wrapped in everlasting flames. I didn't understand the principle behind it. The area was over a thousand degrees Celsius, rendering it utterly unsurvivable for almost all living beings. One theory

posited that this was the work of some sort of divine artifact, apparently.

Libra was the one who'd told me all that though. *Still... You really can't rely on rumors and hearsay, can you?* Ever since hearing Libra's exposition, I'd imagined Muspelheim to be covered in literal flames, but the real thing was quite different. Rather, this was...

"It's frozen."

"Yes. It is."

The land we all looked down upon from the *Argo* was the complete opposite of what I'd imagined. It was referred to as the Burning Lands, but of all things, what I was seeing was an area frozen with a deep, sheer cold. There was a castle erected in the center of all the ice, complete with houses sprawled around it like a castle town, only everything was made of ice. Snow blanketed the ground and just seeing all that made me feel cold. *It looks all mysterious and wondrous from far away, but I'd never want to live there. Yeah.*

"This is probably Aquarius's doing," Libra guessed. "I surmise that she spread her mana and used it to overwrite the natural state of the land."

"Oh? Over all of Muspelheim?"

"It would be possible for her."

"By the way, Libra, how large is Muspelheim?"

"83,500 square kilometers," said Libra.

It's 83,500 square kilometers... Which means it's about as big as Hokkaido. What power, to be able to freeze an area of land that big, land which was originally over a thousand degrees to boot.

The first person I thought of whenever the Water element came to mind was Dina, but it seemed like there were many ways to use the same element given how different Aquarius was.

This is more like an Ice element than Water though. Well, the ice element doesn't exist in this world, so I guess Water would be the closest.

"We're here then. See you soon, Miss Lufas." Aries put one foot up on the edge of the ship, followed by Scorpius, Karkinos, Fenix, and Hydras. He probably

planned to simply jump off and land in town.

I'm sure they'll be fine, given their physical abilities, but won't they be cold dressed like that? Aries had his arms and legs completely exposed to the elements, and Scorpius's outfit was as revealing as always. Karkinos was the most covered up, but it still couldn't be said to be winter clothing, even charitably. *They'll probably be fine though. Still, it doesn't hurt to make sure.*

"Now wait a second. You shouldn't go down there in those clothes. Take these."

With that, I pulled out three sets of thick coats from Maphaahl Tower using Exgate. The coats were something I'd made long ago to wear for a Water-element boss. They boasted high resistance towards both Fire and Water, dropping any damage taken from sources with those two attributes by seventy percent. They did drop the wearer's stats a bit, but the seventy percent cut to damage from the two elements was worth it.

As an aside, my cloak reduced all elemental damage by fifty percent, so this one was actually stronger against the two applicable elements.

Design-wise, the coats were colored in white, black, and red, so I gave each of them the color that best suited them. I pondered silently for a moment. *Scorpius's looks haven't changed much, even in a coat...*

"Also, take this parting gift."

I handed them weapons that I'd crafted as a way to kill time.

Originally, the game *Exgate Online* didn't allow monsters to equip things, probably for game balance, but things were different in this world. Castor, Taurus, and Sagittarius all used weapons as a matter of course, and when I actually thought about it, it was only natural that they'd be able to wield weapons, since they had hands.

I handed Aries a pair of fingerless gloves. There were protrusions on each knuckle, and they were made so that when he punched, the metal would slam into the enemy. It gave +1200 STR and bestowed his attacks with the ability to pierce through elemental resistances. Using this, he'd be able to deal full damage, regardless of his target's Fire resistance.

I handed Scorpius a weapon similar to a sickle and chain. Well, it basically was a sickle and chain, but instead of a sickle on one end, there was a weapon shaped like a scorpion's pincers. When they made contact with an enemy, they would automatically latch on to them. It was a clearly strong weapon that simply gave a bonus of +2000 ATK. It had no other special effects, but its range was long, and it was easy to use.

The most trouble I had was with Karkinos. As for what I had trouble with, it was the fact that he already had weapons—the half scissor blades that he would take out of nowhere. Apparently, those were well and truly weapons. What Scorpius had wielded in the past was something made out of hardened gathered mana, but apparently Karkinos's scissors were something he'd fashioned himself out of his own shell, so I simply improved upon his weapons. Their original stats were a simple +800 ATK, but with my improvements, his weapons now provided +1000 ATK and could hit twice. While I was at it, I added a feature that allowed him to throw the weapons and have them come back to him like a boomerang, so he was now capable of ranged attacks.

I paused, considering things. *Hmm, but... Making weapons for these guys is a bit...*

Sagittarius, Castor, and Taurus weren't capable of large-scale changes in form like Aries and the others were. In fact, Castor didn't even have any other forms, while only Sagittarius's lower half changed. Taurus probably didn't get that big either. On the other hand, Aries, Scorpius, and Karkinos would all change into giant monsters when they got serious, and when they did so they would, of course, become unable to use the weapons I made for them. When I considered that, they probably weren't suited to weapons in the first place. *Well, whatever. It's still better than nothing. Probably, anyway.*

"M-My Lady Lufas presented me with weapons and armor..." said Scorpius. "I'll treasure this as long as I live! I'm going to store it and make it a family treasure to be passed down and worshiped across generations!"

"No, don't store it. Use it. Why do you think We made it?"

At any rate, with this, I'd managed to shore up their abilities a little. Now, even if something were to happen, they'd probably be able to deal with it on

their own as long as it wasn't of incredible magnitude. I hadn't had time to finish the others' equipment, but I planned to make something for everyone.

"Thank you very much, Miss Lufas."

"You're welcome. Take care of Aquarius."

I gave Aries's head a light pat to send him off. From here on out, it was up to them. Of course, I believed in them. Those three would undoubtedly be able to bring Aquarius back.

"Yes!" Aries replied with gusto before finally jumping off the *Argo*.

Following him, Karkinos, Fenix, and Hydras all jumped. The *Argo* was ten thousand meters above the ground at the moment, but that height would be nothing to them. They didn't need a parachute or anything at all.

I'd seen them off, but for some reason Scorpius had yet to depart. I watched her silently. She was looking rather expectant of something, but said nothing, so I patted her on the head too. Once I did, her excitement meter shot way up, and with an overjoyed cry, she jumped off the ship. *She never changes, does she?*

* *

Aries and the others fell from a height of over ten thousand meters, landing a little ways away from town. Right before he landed, Aries threw out some fire, while Scorpius and Karkinos both unleashed a single kick at the ground in order to counter some of the recoil from hitting the earth after falling from so high up. Meanwhile, Fenix and Hydras had originally been able to fly, so it needn't be said that they were fine. They elegantly made their landings a little bit apart from Aries and the other two.

Now that the five of them had landed in Muspelheim, which had been transformed into a land of bitter cold, the fact that the land had been changed so thoroughly from its original form was once again impressed upon them.

"Now that I'm looking at it from up close, it's really hard to believe that this is actually Muspelheim, isn't it?" said Aries. "It's as if this is the far north."

"You're right," agreed Scorpius. "Even though this used to be a nice, warm place, its good points are now completely gone."

“True. I don’t want to disparage Lady Aquarius, but seeing Muspelheim, which used to be a paradise of fire, transformed into a frozen wasteland like this gives me complicated feelings,” said Fenix.

The three Fire-aligned members—Aries, Scorpius, and Fenix—all found the original Muspelheim a comfortable place. Lufas had, in fact, considered that when splitting the teams, so this twist was completely unexpected. However, that didn’t mean she could just change the teams around. Even if she wanted to swap in Aigokeros, there was no one she could swap him in for. If she took out Aries, then she’d be leaving the two most problematic members—Scorpius and Aigokeros—to themselves, and if she took out Scorpius, then Scorpius would be paired with Libra, and that would cause problems. Karkinos was equally unremovable, because he was the lynchpin against Aquarius on the off chance it turned into a fight. In other words, they couldn’t change tack so easily, even though something unexpected had happened.

“Let’s just go into town for now,” suggested Karkinos. “We need to figure out what kind of place this is.”

“Sir Karkinos is right. We aren’t accomplishing anything by sitting around here,” Hydras agreed.

His suggestion was actually a good one. They couldn’t move the situation forward by staying where they were, after all.

No objections came from the rest of the group, so it seemed they all tacitly agreed. They walked, each step leaving footprints behind in the snow as they entered the village. They were greeted with a world of silver as far as the eye could see. The arranged buildings were all made of ice and snow, and they were all dome shaped. Each house was festooned with decorations and accessories, making for a fantastic arrangement. Even the trees which lined the roads were made of ice. Why was that? The ice trees were neatly arranged, and they had snow blooming on their branches in place of leaves.

The phoenix casually snapped off a branch and proceeded to observe it, squeezing it and rubbing it with his fingers. Finally, he subjected it to heat from his palm as he observed, narrowing his eyes. “What strange ice... It doesn’t melt, even under extreme heat. I wonder if all the buildings in this place are

made of the same ice.”

“So beautiful...” said Hydras. “Rather than ice, it’s more like a crystal at this point... This is a crystal town.”

In contrast to the phoenix, who was making an inscrutable face, Hydras was entranced, looking at the silvery village with wonder. *How wonderful. This shining, silver world holds such beauty!* he thought. *This place itself is like a work of art!* His thoughts were completely at odds with the situation.

“Stop getting so starry-eyed, you rube. Crystal town? Ha! You couldn’t sound more pompous if you tried.”

“Shut up, you piece of grilled chicken. I’d say there’s something wrong with *you* if you see all this and don’t feel a thing.”

“Huhhh?”

“Hmmmm?!”

Sparks started to fly at once as Fenix and Hydras grabbed at each other’s collars, though the others simply ignored them and continued on. This was normal for the pair from all the way back two hundred years ago, so there was no point being bothered by it now. They seemed to not get along on the surface, but it was more like they were close enough to fight without holding back, so they were actually quite good friends. This was exactly why nobody really cared that they managed to land simultaneous counterpunches to each other’s faces. If left alone, they’d eventually regain their senses and catch up.

“So? What do we do first?”

“Hmm, well, the basis of all information gathering starts at the T A V E R N. Let’s look for a building that seems like one of those first.”

If one wanted information, then the first thing to find was a place where people gathered. Anyone with adventuring experience could’ve told you that. Lufas had also relied on taverns for information for a period of time, and Karkinos also made use of that social convention for his information-gathering activities. Information gathered where people did, and though some of it turned out to be unreliable rumors, it would all reach the ears of the proprietor of the tavern as well as its regulars.

“Pssshhh, that’s way too much work,” said Scorpius. “Why can’t we just make a beeline for the castle and drag Aquarius out? It’s not like we’re strangers.”

“You do have a point. Is there some reason why we can’t just go in?” asked Aries.

“We have to go find that out. What kind of place is this? Why did Aquarius make a village like this, even though she’s just supposed to be sealing the ouroboros? If we just barge in without at least learning that, we might just be making more trouble for ourselves,” Karkinos explained.

“You’re so cautious.”

“We aren’t allowed to fail this mission, after all.”

As soon as Karkinos mentioned that they weren’t allowed to fail, Scorpius had no choice but to agree, though she seemed a bit fed up with the idea already. He was right; they weren’t allowed to fail. This mission came directly from their master. If they made a mistake and caused Aquarius to refuse to come back, they would no longer be able to face Lufas.

Scorpius thought it over silently for a moment. “Okay, fine. But don’t waste too much time on this, got it? I want to hurry up and finish this so I can go back to flirting with my lady...” That was how Scorpius chose to voice her somewhat unwilling agreement to Karkinos’s plan.

2

The first thing Aries and the others saw when they entered the tavern was people who shouldn’t have been on this dark continent, and they were all lively. There were humans, beastfolk, elves, heaven-winged, dwarves, and halflings, so it was a motley assortment, but nevertheless, they experienced a small shock at seeing people here. Ever since the Seven Heroes had been brought low by the Devil King, the land humanity was able to live on continued to gradually shrink, until the world was in its current state, with livable land consisting only of a small portion of the surface. In other words, the only places humanity should have been found were where Aries and the others used to be active. Therefore,

it was unexpected, almost unthinkable, for some to be living in Muspelheim, which was the most dangerous area to humanity in the entirety of the dark continent.

The customers were all packed in tightly as they sat around the interior, which was also covered in everlasting ice while they themselves were covered in warm clothing. It didn't seem to them like these people were fearful about whether or not they would survive tomorrow.

"It's a normal thing, but apparently the furniture isn't also ice," Scorpius said rather disinterestedly as she touched a nearby table.

Even if the ice wouldn't melt, it seemed that furniture like tables and chairs would still be made of other materials. Still, that didn't change the generally cold surroundings. However, considering that they were basically inside ice, it could be said that the tavern was strangely warm.

"It's still cold by any other standard, but this is actually pretty nice compared to the outside," said Aries.

"I believe the secret to that lies within this ice, Sir Aries," said Hydras. "This ice does not just never melt. It probably has air captured in it and is closer to snow in property rather than ice."

Snow would envelop air and was an excellent insulator. That was why caves and houses made of snow were surprisingly warm inside. Of course, that was only in relation to the outside, but in terms of physical experience, it would be rather pleasant. Hydras explained all this while looking at the never-melting ice with a gaze of respect and praise as someone of the same element.

"Oh? Hey, I haven't seen you all around these parts before."

While Aries and his group had been looking around the interior of the building curiously, a dwarf who seemed to be the owner called out to them. As soon as Scorpius saw him, she rudely commented, "They really do all look exactly the same..."

Two hundred years ago, Lufas had mentioned something similar to Scorpius, saying, "I can't tell any of them apart, other than Mizar," and Scorpius had reflected the opinion here. Of course, Scorpius couldn't even have picked out

Mizar from a lineup either.

“Well, I’ve seen you enough to be tired of it. Do all dwarves just look the same?”

“How rude.”

Scorpius fundamentally paid no one other than Lufas any respect, so she would easily say things that could be construed as rude to others. Karkinos, realizing that this tendency would only cause unnecessary trouble, had Scorpius step back before taking his place at the counter instead.

“S O R R Y. She didn’t mean anything by it. By the way, bartender, what kind of place is this?”

“What, you don’t know?” asked the bartender.

“N O, I don’t. M E and my friends here are travelers.”

“Travelers...? In this world controlled by the devilfolk? You all sure are eccentric. Either that, or you just have a lot of confidence in yourselves.”

“Well, one or the other.”

In contrast to his ridiculous speech patterns, Karkinos’s ability to communicate was high. At least, it was high enough to be incomparable to that of Aries, who had fallen into depression after Lufas’s disappearance, and Scorpius, who had gone berserk. After all, he was the only one among the Twelve Stars who had decided to blend in with humans, and he’d succeeded to boot. That might have been one of the reasons why Lufas had added him to the team. It might have seemed unexpected, given how he usually acted, but Karkinos was actually quite cautious and patient.

“This place, huh...? Hmm, well for starters, the name is Nectar. It used to be called the Burning World of Muspelheim.”

“M E knows about that second part already. That was why we were so surprised. We would never have expected Muspelheim to have turned into a town like this.”

“Ha! What era did you come from? This place hasn’t been burning like that for two hundred years now!”

“O H! Two hundred whole years?”

“Indeed. You know how humanity lost against the devilfolk two hundred years ago, don’t you? Ever since then, humans have had to choose between death or abandoning their homes. But there were some who failed to escape in time or somehow refused to abandon their homes, and so they were left here.”

The bartender’s words were convincing. It was true that humanity had been chased into only a small fraction of their previous lands, and it would have been impossible for all of them to have made it. It was only natural for some of them to have been unable to escape or to otherwise have refused to stop fighting, but the problem came after that. People like that were to be reasonably expected, but that just meant seeing them surviving and living in a town like this was all the more impossible. There was no way the devilfolk, who had control of this territory, would have simply let them be.

“Well, apparently things were awful after that. Fighting against the devilfolk was all well and good, but of course, that meant that people dropped like flies. But at that moment our king, Aquarius, closed off Muspelheim in ice, freezing all the approaching devilfolk. Seeing that, our ancestors must have realized that they had to rely on Aquarius’s favor. They all pledged loyalty to Aquarius in exchange for protection. And we weren’t just given protection. This town was built for us, and we’re allowed to live in peace, even in this hostile land.”

“Oh ho, I see. So that’s what happened.” Karkinos reached into his pocket, intending to retrieve a coin, but suddenly, he changed his mind, went for a different pocket, and instead, he pulled out a small gem. “Thanks! That was a good story. This is a token of my appreciation.”

“H-Hey, this is a gem! I can’t take that. It’s way too much!”

“No, no. You’ve got it all wrong. Unfortunately, none of us have any of this town’s money on us. This is the cheapest thing we can pay with.”

“W-Wait, but... This is worth way too much. What I told you isn’t worth that.”

“Then could I trouble you to tell me one more thing? Let’s call it even after that.”

“Mrr... Fine, got it. I’ll tell you anything. Though the gem is still worth way

more than anything I could tell you. Anyway, what was it you wanted to ask?"

With that, Karkinos's glasses glinted forebodingly. The subject he was about to broach was something risky that might have roused suspicions were he to bring it up cold, but now that the bartender had said he would talk about anything, there was a much lower risk of that happening.

Dwarves were fundamentally possessed of a very strong sense of honor and gratitude, and they disliked being in others' debts. That was why Karkinos figured he could bring about this situation by revealing an expensive jewel. He'd extracted a verbal promise out of the dwarf, so now, the dwarf would be loath to go back on his word. His plan had gone so well it was actually kind of scary. *Huh. I might actually have some talent as a strategist*, Karkinos thought, praising himself.

If Pollux had heard what was going on in his head, she would have cut his preening in two by saying, "It was just a coincidence."

"Then how would we gain an audience with your queen?" asked Karkinos.

"Queen...?"

"I'm talking about your ruler. The queen?"

"What're you going on about? Aquarius is a man."

Surprised, Karkinos hesitated before continuing with, "Ah, I see! That was rude of me. I had assumed Aquarius was a lady from the sound of the name!" Karkinos responded breezily while giving looks to Scorpius and Aries.

Catching that, the two of them nodded. His look conveyed a clear message: "Apparently, things are about to get a little troublesome."

"Hmm..." The bartender thought it over for a moment. "Wouldn't it be impossible to meet him directly? Unless you managed to achieve something particularly noteworthy, or you happen to be people of high standing..."

"Noteworthy, you say?"

"Like defeating the attacking devilfolk or their leader, Pluto..." said the bartender, growing quiet for a moment. "That's probably impossible, though."

"Pluto?" asked Karkinos.

“The one in charge of the devilfolk around here. He’s not as strong as His Majesty Aquarius, but he’s still incredibly strong. He’s had his sights set on this place for decades. His Majesty apparently can’t leave this place for some reason, so there’ve been many casualties. Pluto’s awful,” said the bartender.

With that information, Karkinos’s mouth twisted into a smile. *I see. So if we beat him, then we could create an excuse to see Aquarius.* It was a simple option that didn’t risk offending “her,” something that simply barging in might do.

“That was some good info, bartender.”

“You going already?”

“Yeah. We know what we need to do, after all.”

“Is that so? Come by again if you’re in the neighborhood. I’ll let all of you drink for free.”

He probably said that because he already got the gem as payment. He really is a dwarf. I already said this was for the information, but he’s still not satisfied. I don’t know whether to call that soft or stubborn.

However, Karkinos didn’t dislike men like the bartender. After replying with, “Sure thing. If we’re in the area again,” Karkinos regrouped with Scorpius and his group before heading outside.

* *

Five hundred kilometers away from Nectar was a city—though it was far too large for the normal definition of one. After all, the city itself was bigger than the sum area of all of the lands humanity inhabited. At that point, it was already a nation unto itself, and its skyline was rife with lined-up high-rise buildings and skyscrapers that were reminiscent of the cities and cultures of the most prominent nations of the hero Sei’s home world, Earth. It remained lit even at night thanks to the light of mana, and it was replete with all manner of recreational facilities. Its splendor reflected well on the devilfolk’s status as the rulers of most of the surface.

Of course, its citizens were a far cry from virtuous. If a visitor were to look in on the city’s recreational options, they’d see a plethora of games in bad taste. In “Human Hammering,” the contestants competed to see who could beat

down the most captured humans. There was also “Beastfolk Battle Japes,” in which they forced tamed beastfolk to kill each other, with bragging rights for the winner on the line. A third such example was “Human Darts,” in which they used captured people as targets for a dart game, scoring points depending on the body part hit.

The devilfolk walked through the streets with no hint of fear, enjoying their lives as if they owned the place. None of them doubted the safety of their peaceful lives for a second. To them, humanity no longer mattered. They were sure that at some point the Devil King would destroy them all. That was why it was so sudden to them.

The sound of a giant footstep reverberated throughout the city. The next thing the devilfolk heard was some sort of unidentifiable roar. It shook the ground and seemed to tear apart the very sky. Wondering what was going on, the devilfolk all looked up towards the source of the noise, more out of interest than anything else, as they were still in the thralls of peace. That was when they saw it. A gigantic sheep, shaking the very earth as it headed straight for the city. Its body was covered in rainbow-colored fire, and it melted the buildings themselves as it mercilessly continued on.

“Wh-What the hell is that? A monster?!”

“No way... It’s too huge!”

“Where’s the army?! The hell are they doing?!”

Just by walking, the gigantic sheep toppled buildings. The devilfolk’s finely wrought civilization, their culture, and all their preparations were rendered moot. The sheep didn’t even notice it was sowing so much destruction; it happened just by its walking.

But the nightmare didn’t end there. “*Beware, devilfolk.*” The sheep was there to announce the end of their peaceful days.

The next thing to appear was a giant scorpion monster. The ground cracked as it revealed itself, its repulsive form coming up from the crevice. With one swing of its tail, the scorpion mowed down buildings, and just by moving its pincers, it could pulverize earth. From the ocean came a crab monster, who continued on to the land.

In response to all that, the devilfolk's armies moved to attack. Flying devilfolk launched their spells in unison, and their cannon-like projectiles burst one after the other after making contact with the three monsters. However, the monsters didn't stop. They didn't even waver. Even while bathing in the multitude of frontal attacks, they simply continued on, shrugging the attacks off as if they were mere bites from a mosquito.

"Ksshhhaaaaahh...!"

The giant scorpion opened up its pincers. Fire gathered within the spread pincers, its heat exponentially building. The buildup came with an ominous rumbling that grew in cadence, and anyone who saw it could feel the inescapable death budding within that fire. In order to prevent that, the army desperately continued its attacks, but they didn't seem to work at all. The scorpion monster made a noise as if it was laughing at them as it released its destructive ball of fire.

It was like a flash of heat that would never end. The line of flames continued on past the horizon, piercing through buildings in its burning path. The scorpion even went further, swinging its pincers around and moving the fire to burn down the entire city. And the flames didn't just come from its pincers. Both the scorpion's mouth and tail unleashed lines of fire, sweeping them left and right, and back and forth.

The rainbow flames the sheep spat out covered a wide area and continuously ignited secondary fires. Meanwhile, the attacks shot out by the devilfolk army seemed to be sucked towards the crab monster somehow before exploding, and the next moment, the army would be hit by the crab's claws in a counterattack.

It was truly a disaster, one that had finally caught up with the devilfolk after two hundred years. In front of such a disaster, there was nothing they could do. Their only options were to run around in a panic, hide, or stand still and pray.

In the midst of the disintegrating city, a single devilfolk man shivered as he looked on from a tower a margin larger than the other buildings. His name was Pluto, and his level was 420. He was strong enough to surpass even the Seven Luminaries, but because he put his priority into building the city he controlled

rather than invading the human territories, he'd refused Terra's invitation and stayed in his current position. Though, that was just an excuse. In truth, he simply became fearful and decided to stop his progress in this place.

As one of the few survivors from two hundred years ago, he knew about Lufas Mapphaahl as well as the walking disasters that followed her. Everyone else called him strong. They put him up on a pedestal as someone stronger than the Seven Luminaries, but that was wrong. It just was. There was nobody strong in this city. In the end, they were just comparing weak people to other weak people... If any of the devilfolk here were to use a true monster as a measuring stick, they would all look like mere bugs.

That was exactly why Pluto refused the position of leader of the invasion force. He didn't want to be one of the Seven Luminaries. After all, those monsters still existed in the human territories... And most of all, Pluto couldn't bring himself to believe that Lufas Mapphaahl had truly died.

And my gut feeling was correct. Look! Look at this vista of despair! This nightmare! This manifestation of Hel that has crossed two hundred years to appear here in front of me!

"Two hundred years... Well, I guess that's a pretty good record." With trembling hands, Pluto brought a cigar to his mouth and lit it.

Yeah, I knew this would happen. I knew this day was coming. After all, this whole world is nothing but a playground for the Goddess, and we're her dolls.

Having been the only one to realize that, Pluto had managed to run around miserably in the dirt until he gained his current position of power, one which he'd used to indulge in all kinds of luxuries until today.

"Ahhh..."

That was why the man was able to put on a self-deprecating smile as he enjoyed his last smoke. Outside the tower, a giant sheep opened its mouth, clearly intending to breathe fire at Pluto. However, at this point, he didn't even feel like running.

Times change, just like how Lufas Mapphaahl once rose to power, as well as how she lost it. Now it's my turn... That's all it is. The devilfolk man gave a thin

laugh as he breathed out a puff of smoke and watched the incoming flames.

“The end is always rather unsatisfying, isn’t it?” the devilfolk who knew of the world two hundred years ago muttered hopelessly, right before the entire building he was in took a direct hit from a wash of rainbow-colored flames and disappeared.

The end of the devilfolk’s prosperity had been announced. Until today, they had managed to oppress humanity while indulging in sweet peace, but the time to pay that debt had come. Those who knew of the past would probably think back to it, while the younger generations who didn’t would probably just shrink in fear. The calamities with wills, the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars, once again gathered under the Black-Winged Conqueror. Now the devilfolk knew of this fact and the despair that came with it.

3

Aries and the others decimated the devilfolk city in a single night, and the next day, they were invited to the castle of ice. The castle, surrounded on all sides by never-melting ice, was replete with knights equipped with ice swords and armor on parade. *Wouldn’t that be really cold?* Aries thought, but the most likely answer was that they weren’t human inside either. In fact, there might not be anything inside.

There was a boy in extravagant clothing waiting for them in the throne room, his chin resting on a hand. He looked down appraisingly at the group of five. Then, this period of observation ended. He spread his arms wide and made a show of greeting them.

“You’ve accomplished some great feats, travelers! You managed to take Pluto’s head. Well done! I will grant you anything you desire as a reward, be it riches, glory, or authority. Speak your wish!”

Well now, that’s quite generous, Scorpius thought, her lips curling upwards. *Not to mention laughable. Seems like he still hasn’t figured out who he’s talking to. What an ungrateful little man, even if it’s been two hundred years.*

Scorpius exasperatedly pulled up her hair as she sent the boy on the throne a look of scorn. “How generous of you. Then we would like a meeting with Aquarius, Mr. StandIn.”

“Huh? What are you talking about? I *am* Aqua—”

“Unfortunately, we’re not interested in a simple carrier. We have business with the Water Bearer, Ganymedes.”

Having been referred to by his real name, the fake king who called himself Aquarius flinched. Indeed, he wasn’t Aquarius at all. Of course, he wasn’t completely unrelated either. He was a monster who had been appointed to the role of “carrier” by Aquarius, who couldn’t be bothered to move by herself. He was level 600 too, and thus an excellently strong specimen. He had no special or unique abilities, but in simple stats, he could compete fairly well with Castor.

Still, that basically just meant he was almost nothing to any of the Twelve Stars actually suited for combat. He was no threat for Scorpius or the like. He most likely had finally realized just who it was he was looking down upon as well. His face visibly paled and a waterfall of sweat started to pour out of him.

“You... All of you are... No, I mean...!”

“Let us pass. You can’t possibly think of saying no, can you?”

After a moment, Ganymedes stuttered, “P-Please, come through.”

The surrounding knights didn’t seem to react at all to what just happened. If they were living people, they would have shown some sort of reaction, such as confusion or possibly anger, at the people who were being rude to their ruler. Therefore, the fact that they had no reaction whatsoever meant that these knights had no sense of self; they were simple puppets.

Scorpius and the others passed by Ganymedes and proceeded on through the curtain behind the throne. This castle seemed to be laid out so that anything past the throne was the king’s private area, where no one else was allowed. It was simple to understand.

As for Aquarius’s location... That was easy to figure out as well. She was in the back of the room they’d just entered. There, a giant water pitcher stood completely in plain sight. She didn’t even try to hide. The pitcher was about

three meters tall. It was big enough to seem tough to carry around, but it wouldn't be much trouble for anyone here, given their levels. After all, their master was Lufas, who could lift and throw a 170-meter-long dragon with a single hand.

"It's been a while, Aquarius. Come out here."

It took a while for a response to come, but eventually a young-sounding girl's voice came out of the pitcher, responding to Scorpius's call. "Hmm? Oh my, those are some nostalgic voices, aren't they?"

Her face popped out of the opening in the water pitcher, and just by physical looks, she seemed to be only twelve. She was wearing some strange cherry blossom-pink clothes—they were traditional clothes from a country that had existed over two hundred years ago called Wakoku, and it was called a kimono. She was also wearing a hairpin that was modeled after a sakura bloom. Her hair was a deep navy blue, and her eyes were also blue. At first glance, she was a cute and lovely little girl, and a smile like a blooming flower formed on her face after seeing her old comrades.



However, not having a person's appearance match up with their actual age was par for the course by now, and there were many such cases among the Twelve Stars. Aquarius was one of those examples as well; she did not look her age at all. In fact, it wasn't certain if the concept of aging even applied to her. After all, she wasn't a monster or a person at all. She wasn't even a golem. She was a tool with a will made by the Goddess... In other words, she was an item.

Her official name was Sacred Artifact: Empress of the Sea, Aquarius. Even the face and body she was peeking out of her pitcher with were simply things made of water in order for her to be able to communicate with others easier. Her true body was the pitcher.

"Oh my, oh my. If it isn't the actual lesbian scorpion, the fool crab, and the sheep brat. Man, you're makin' me nostalgic! Behind you all is... Uh, who were they again?"

"I'm Fenix!"

"I'm Hydras!"

"Oh, that's right!" Aquarius said. "The grilled chicken and the blue snake!"

"I'm a phoenix!"

"I'm a water dragon!"

Also, Aquarius was patently unable to remember people's names, possibly because she was an item. That was why she tended to call people by their races rather than their names, whether they were friend or foe. It was so extreme that she even referred to Lufas as "owner" rather than by her name. Luckily, though her speech was rather rude, she wasn't as wild and violent as Leon. In fact, she was rather friendly to just about anyone and was in the section of the Twelve Stars with a more moderate temperament.

Aquarius rested her elbows on the rim of her pitcher, laughing throatily as she talked. "So, did you all need somethin'? You came all the way here, after all. I'll at least treat you all to food."

"Ahhh... Yeah. That's great and all, but we didn't come to play. Actually, Miss Lufas has returned, so we came to bring you back."

Aquarius paused, then said, “Ahhh... ’zat so? So it’s already been two hundred years... Time flies, don’t it?” Aquarius didn’t show much surprise at the news. In fact, she seemed like she’d known this would happen from the start when she spoke.

Seeing that, Scorpius couldn’t help but experience a fairly heavy amount of jealousy. Lufas had never said a word to her about her revival, but Parthenos, Pollux, and Aquarius all knew. She knew why this was. Lufas had probably wanted to keep her revival a secret, even from her friends, but if she had, then she couldn’t have relied on those who were sealing the ouroboroses to remain there. They might have left their post or even, in the worst case, proceeded to attack humanity themselves, so she had only told a select few in order to make sure that didn’t happen. Scorpius knew that, but knowing didn’t make her feel any better.

“But now’s not a great time. Could you wait a bit?”

“Did something happen?”

“Yeah... I guess it did. I’m sure all of you already know I’m sealing the Fire ouroboros, but it’s a pretty light sleeper. Every twenty years or so it creates an avatar to wander about like a sleepwalker. Not only that, but because it’s half-asleep, it burns up anything that’s near it. It’s a lot of trouble.” Aquarius seemed annoyed as she talked, eventually heaving a sigh. “Well, it calms right down as soon as the avatar’s destroyed, and in the end, it’s just a half-asleep avatar, so it’s not all that strong. Still, it’s part of an ouroboros. Of course, it’s stronger than any old monster or devilfolk.”

“I see. Meaning you can’t leave until it’s defeated. No wonder you had so much trouble with Pluto.”

“Oh yeah, that. Well, he would have proven to be a bit much for my carrier. My carrier probably wouldn’t lose one-on-one, but an army that big would be a bit too much for him,” Aquarius said as she looked at Ganymedes. She wasn’t exactly blaming him for it or anything, but Ganymedes still flinched. “Anyway, enough about that. He was just a small fry who didn’t matter even if he was left alone.”

“Heyyy, then doesn’t that mean we just worked for nothing?”

“Ha ha ha! Sorry, sorry. Oh, getting back on track... It looks like you brought in some replacements for me, but the grilled chicken and blue snake there won’t stand a chance. I can’t come with you unless we take care of this. Sorry ’bout that.”

Hydras and Fenix were by no means weak. In fact, they were very strong monsters. One was a phoenix, the strongest of the bird-type monsters, who had very strong regenerative abilities as well as high firepower. The other was a dragon, well known as the strongest race with their strong physical and magic attack abilities. Either one of them held the power to change the face of this planet, if they so chose, but even then, Aquarius had judged them as insufficient.

“Then W E will help you exorcise this avatar,” said Karkinos.

“Huh? I mean, that’d be great, but... Are you sure?”

“Y E S. W E need to fulfill our duty of bringing you back. We will help you, if that’s what’s necessary.” Karkinos winked before turning to look at his comrades behind him.

Aries nodded. Hydras and Fenix likewise indicated their willingness to help. The only one who looked unhappy was Scorpius, but even she seemed to have realized that this was the best option. Reluctantly, she spat out, “Just do what you want.”

“Okay. Then let’s all get to it tomorrow. It’s time to put that pesky dragon back to sleep,” Aquarius said happily. Aries and the others joined her in her laughter as well.

It seemed that this mission would end without them having to fight another member of the Twelve Stars.

The next day, Aries and the rest were led underground, but rather than the castle’s basement, it was more like the subterranean level of the whole of Nectar. Under the land of ice lay a surprisingly huge cage of ice, and it was so cold any normal person would quickly freeze to death, even with cold-weather clothing. It was one hundred degrees below freezing in the cage, but not only were the Water-aligned Hydras and Aquarius fine, even Aries and Scorpius seemed fine. Once again, common sense didn’t apply to monsters of sufficiently

high level.

If they were frail enough to fall to this cold, they would never be able to withstand ice magic unleashed at them by enemies. Even if it was the element they were weak to, Aries and the rest would never be taken down by mere temperature. They did feel cold, and none of them wanted to stay here too long, but that was it.

Ganymedes walked in front while carrying Aquarius, followed by the group of five led by Aries. Eventually, they reached the deepest part of the ice cage, and they finally lay eyes on *it*.

“So that is an ouroboros...”

“This is ridiculous. Just its snout is bigger than me in my true form!” Scorpius exclaimed.

It was absolutely enormous. Too enormous, even. They could only see the tip of its head, just from the nose on. Everything other than that was buried underground; they could literally only see a small part of it. However, even that small part was bigger than Scorpius in her monster form. The true scale of this creature beggared belief.

I see. No wonder it has to be sealed. It's not a question of strong or weak; we wouldn't even get a turn with this thing.

“Hey, are you sure the seal works? I heard from Miss Lufas that this isn't something you can actually seal, so you're just making sure the surroundings don't change so they think that the world is still at peace and stay asleep...”

“Oh? So that's how the others do it. But too bad for you, that's not what we're doing here. Rather, such a laid-back method wouldn't work here. As I said before, this one's a light sleeper.”

Aries was remembering how the Ouroboros of Heaven was sealed. Lufas had explained how it worked after they'd seen it, and the seal wasn't actually something that could even be called as such. It was simply maintaining the surroundings. However, the seal for the Ouroboros of Fire was clearly different. The surroundings had changed drastically.

Aquarius answered the question while playing with her hair. “My method is

simple. Just cool it as much as possible to sap its energy and liveliness. This one's really easy to understand. Get it? When it's hot, it overflows with energy, but when it's cold, it hibernates. That was why I was given the job, given my alignment."

Aquarius looked forward and spoke as if it was a huge bother. She was gazing at a single young man who was standing in front of the dragon like a ghost.



“Even then, it still sends out half-asleep avatars like this though.”

“So that’s an avatar?” Karkinos asked.

“Yeah, no doubt,” Aquarius said in confirmation.

As always, the Water Bearer had her upper half sticking out of the pitcher, not intending to move by herself at all. *Amazing that Ganymedes never gets tired.* Karkinos felt a little sympathetic towards him.

“So the avatar is still human shaped even though it’s so big?” asked Hydras.

“I’m not sure why that is. Apparently, the Avatar skill always produces human-shaped ones. There are four types though. Spirits born from divine power, or fairies which evolve from spirits. The devilfolk, who spring forth from mana. And lastly, those made by borrowing the wombs of people and inserting a part of their soul into it so that their avatar is naturally birthed. The most troublesome one is the last. Unlike other avatars, they’re actually living, so they’re indistinguishable from normal people. Not even Observing Eye can identify one,” Aquarius replied.

Spirits and fairies needn’t be expounded on further. Pollux and Castor were counted among their number. The devilfolk could not strictly be called avatars. They weren’t clones of someone else, but magic spells with a will, after all, and the last one currently held no examples. In truth, though, Aries and the others had only recently been in contact with one...

“And that one is?” Fenix asked.

“Ah, the first type. Basically a spirit,” Aquarius responded.

Even while giving that commentary, Aquarius’s sight never strayed from the Fire ouroboros’s avatar. It showed no signs of moving yet, but as soon as they attacked it, the thing would respond. However, that also meant that as long as they did nothing, they would have some time to lay on some buffs.

Aquarius activated her unique skill, targeting Aries and the others. “Skill: Sadachbia.”

Sadachbia, the hidden lucky star—its effect was to bestow a special buff called “Lucky Star.” Those under the effects of the buff would be able to

“luckily” dodge a set number of attacks. It was a skill that buffed dodge, basically guaranteeing a dodge for allies. Of course, this skill was by no means all-powerful. Those who could throw out continuous attacks at ridiculous speeds, like Benetnasch, could quickly eat through the Lucky Star’s effects, and Libra’s Brachium would hit those with the buff directly, ignoring the buff.

Also, skills had a priority. If a sure-hit skill clashed with a sure-dodge skill, for example, the higher-level one with better priority would be the one to take effect. Sadachbia had a low priority in exchange for being able to take effect multiple times. Its weakness was that basically all sure-x skills would go right through it. Even so, it was plenty strong, even unfairly so. There was no doubt that its power as a support skill was great.

“Now then, it’s our first fight together in a while. I’m counting on all of you!” said Aquarius.

“Understood! Let’s go, Fenix!” said Hydras.

“Right!” Fenix shouted.

Their spirits were high. Leading the way was the job of the underlings. The red-and-blue monster duo jumped forth in unison, charging at the Fire ouroboros’s avatar.

4

Faced with Hydras and Fenix charging at him, the Fire ouroboros’s avatar showed no reaction. It was unclear whether he considered them unworthy of even reacting to, or if they were too fast for him to react to. Either way, it was good for the pair of them, since he wasn’t moving. Fenix gave the Avatar a sharp glare as he charged in.

Among the skills he had, there were several that were obtainable only by monsters. His glare was one of them, and it was named “Binding Eye.” Its effect was to lower a single target’s defense and render them unable to move for a short period of time.

On top of that skill, Fenix raised his arms, summoning a vortex of fire from under the Avatar's feet. It was the Fire element spell "Flare Tornado." The spell wasn't especially powerful, but it dealt multiple ticks of damage and bound the enemy in place until the spell was over. Even so, the damage would be minimal, since the enemy was the Ouroboros of Fire, the pinnacle of all Fire-aligned beings. Fire-aligned attacks would have no meaning to it. In fact, the Avatar absorbed the flames and regained HP; it had the opposite effect, so the spell was purely in order to stop the Avatar. Hydras was the real threat.

"Tidal Wave!"

Tidal Wave, which was a high-ranking Water element spell that the Wise King Megrez was most proficient in, manifested a tsunami of water flowing in a specified direction from nowhere. It was a wide-area-of-effect spell that aimed to crush the enemy. The Water spell had excellent power and scale while keeping a fairly low cost to use, and so was an excellent spell to use as a main means of attack. It wouldn't be too much to say that proficiency in this spell determined a Water mage's true worth.

The tsunami raged forth, threatening to swallow up the entire area of this by no means small cage of ice, which was fifty meters tall, one kilometer long, and eight hundred meters wide. Aquarius had erected a barrier around the group and defended against it completely, but the Avatar was swept away by the fierce torrent of water with no resistance. The tsunami seemed like it would keep going and hit the main dragon body, but Aquarius shut that possibility off with a barrier as well.

"You idiot! Don't hit the main body! What if it wakes up?!"

"S-Sorry!" apologized Hydras.

Shaking the dragon awake in the process of trying to put it back to sleep was like putting the cart before the horse. Hydras meekly took Aquarius's scolding, lowering his head in shame. Seeing that, Fenix made to insult him and laugh, but before he could, Hydras raised his head again and the opportunity was lost.

However, the Avatar still wasn't moving, even after their attacks. As always, it was just standing there.

"This bastard. He's making fun of us."

“‘S he tryin’ to say that our attacks aren’t even worth dodging? Well, I’m happy to break that confidence into pieces!”

After seeing the Avatar completely unaffected, the two of them charged forth once more in irritation, landing simultaneous kicks. The blows were powerful, proven the other day during their assault on the devilfolk city when they had managed to topple an over-fifty-meters-tall high-rise building in one blow and still had the resultant pressure wave destroy several buildings behind it.

The Avatar was hit with two of those kicks at the same time too! They both struck the Avatar’s face with perfect timing, but at the moment of impact, the pair’s faces twisted in shock.

What the hell...? thought Fenix. He’s so solid!

And heavy too! We hit him straight on, but he wasn’t lifted into the air even a little! Hydras thought.

It would be hard to describe the strange response that ran through their limbs when the kicks impacted. A layperson would say something like, “It was like kicking steel,” but ironically, the two of them could kick through steel as if it were a sandcastle, so they were unable to find a sufficient comparison. That was just how solid and heavy the Avatar was. But it seemed they managed to at least make it pay them a little attention.

The Avatar, which had up until now not moved at all, casually grabbed both their legs.

“Whooaaarrgghh?!”

“C-Crap... This power!”

Their legs crumpled under a surprisingly strong grip as their bones broke. The two of them instantly realized that escaping would be impossible, so they chopped their own legs off with their hands and leapt backwards to open up distance. Immediately after, Fenix’s stump spat fire as his leg regenerated, while meat simply swelled from Hydras’s stump as his leg also restored itself.

The Avatar followed up by swinging down his hand in a chopping motion and releasing an invisible blade. But thanks to the effect of Sadachbia, the invisible blade bent its path as if it was trying to avoid the two of them, and the attack

missed.

Taking advantage of that opening, the two stood back up and roared in anger.

“GODDAAMMIIIIITT! DON’T YOU DARE LOOK DOWN ON US!”

“YOU BASTARD. I’LL KILL YOU DEAD!”

Their usual elegance and composure were nowhere to be found. With their anger switches flipped, their eyes turned bloodshot and their viciousness as monsters was displayed at full force.

Fenix clad both his hands in fire and combined them into a shining white ball. He would be casting the Fire element’s most powerful single-target spell. It was the origin of fire, and it pierced through all elemental resistances, so even those of the Fire alignment would be left as ashes. Its name was—

“Burn to nothing! Prometheus!”

The ball burned bright at a seething ten million degrees as it directly impacted the Avatar. The power of it even managed to somewhat melt the ice that was supposed to never melt.

At the same time, Hydras also cast one of the Water element’s strongest spells. It was a stage below the spell Dina had cast before—Hermes, Who is Thrice Mighty—but even then, it boasted the most powerful force the Water element could bring to bear against a single target. It aimed to simply crush the target under the violent pressure of water. The water’s momentum was strong enough to blast a target to the ends of the ocean.

“I’m going to crush you flat! Oceanus!”

A superheavy mass that seemed to contain an entire ocean’s worth of compressed water hit the Avatar at the same time as Fenix’s Prometheus.

But the two of them weren’t done yet. Now that the superheated ball had hit the target at the same time as a supercompressed mass of water, the pair’s assault reached the next stage. Prometheus evaporated Oceanus’s water, causing an explosion as it vaporized. The explosion wasn’t all either. Fenix and Hydras also enveloped the Avatar in a spherical barrier, trapping the explosion that would normally have spread out wide enough to burn away an entire

continent into a mere one-and-a-half-meter-wide space.

There was a flash, and then, an explosion.

Having been compressed, the explosion lost some of its flashiness, but it had gained more than its fair share of deadliness. It was undoubtedly a miniaturized catastrophe. The leftover energy turned into smoke that blocked vision as Fenix and Hydras laughed, as if already sure of their victory.

“It’s over!”

“There’s no need to even check. No one would be fine after taking that.”

It seemed they were indeed completely sure of their victory.

Aries, who had been watching from behind the two, was honestly impressed, his eyes wide. *That attack just now was amazing! If it hit me, even I’d take a huge amount of damage. My HP might even go dangerously low.*

“Wow, that was great, you two!” praised Aries.

“N I C E F I G H T!” said Karkinos. “You did better than I expected!”

“Yeah. Well, sure, that was impressive, but... What do you think, Aquarius?” Unlike Aries and Karkinos, who were simply impressed and overjoyed, Scorpius reacted coldly.

Aquarius gave a strained laugh seeing that as she gave her honest impression. “They did well. Just give it to ‘em. They managed to do more than I’d expected.”

As Aquarius spoke, the smoke lifted and gave way to an intense flash. The two flashes once again missed, thanks to the effects of Sadachbia, but they weren’t so lucky with the red shadow that leapt out right afterward. The Avatar grabbed Fenix and Hydras’s faces at a speed they couldn’t react to and slammed them into the ground. That alone caused the ice that was tough enough that Prometheus had only melted it a little to crack apart. Meanwhile, the entirety of Nectar shook like it was experiencing an earthquake.

Fenix and Hydras didn’t take that lying down. Even as they were being pressed into the floor and gushing blood, they kicked at the Avatar, but their kicks did nothing; the Avatar didn’t budge a millimeter.

The Avatar slammed their foreheads together before letting go and

unleashing a roundhouse into the both of them. That one blow sent them flying like mere sticks, and they were buried in the wall of ice beyond. They'd taken so much damage that their arms and legs were broken. Fenix even had one of his arms torn off.

"Tch! You've done it now!"

"Don't you dare look down on us, you bastard!"

The two of them immediately regenerated from their wounds, kicked off the wall they were buried in, and moved to punch at the Avatar. They unleashed punches and kicks at such a speed that not even the Seven Luminaries would've been able to follow with their eyes, but no blow got through; each one was blocked, parried, or dodged.

The two of them disappeared, having rounded onto the Avatar's back, but the next instant, the Avatar had done the same thing before landing a light attack that looked like a poke, causing the two to go down. Actually, he hadn't even hit them. The attack missed under the effects of Sadachbia, but the resultant wind pressure from the attack had blown them over.

"N-No way...!"

"H-He's treating us like we're children...!"

The Avatar's eyes narrowed, and he seemed bored as he moved to give them the coup de grâce. There was a delayed sound of a hammer blow and a spreading shock wave, but neither of the two felt any pain. When they opened their eyes, they saw that the blow that was meant for them had been stopped by Karkinos's forehead.

"W E L L D O N E! That was a great fight, you two. But it's about time to switch fighters. W E will be doing the fighting from here on out."

Karkinos swung, unleashing his counter. His Acubens, which had the enemy's power behind it, dug into the Avatar's cheek, throwing the Avatar into the ice wall even though he had up until now been unmoving.

Surprised at this turn of events, the Avatar's eyes went wide as Karkinos equipped his scissors. Aries and Scorpius came up to flank him on either side.

“Be careful of his grabbing attack, everyone. Looks like that one’s a sure-hit skill. It bypassed the sure-dodge buff on Fenix and Hydras.”

“Sure seems that way. Think we can do it?” Scorpius asked Aries, her smile never wavering, even after Aquarius’s warning.

“It’ll be fine,” Aries responded, voice full of confidence. “Now that we know about it, we’ll be able to deal with it somehow!”

As soon as he said that, Aries leapt, closing the distance to the Avatar in an instant. They were both fire-aligned, so Aries’s action was nothing but reckless. His opponent was the peak of the Fire element after all, and Aries was among the weakest of all fire-aligned monsters, which meant that, under normal circumstances, this fight should never have happened. However, Aries was not weak. He had been trained and equipped by Lufas, so he had no reason to fear. All he had to do was believe in his master and fight to his utmost.

“HAAGGHHH!!!”

Aries’s fists collided with the Avatar over and over, dealing noticeable damage thanks to the gloves’ resistance-piercing effect. In pure numbers, he was dealing 99,999 damage every time. The more HP the opponent had, the more damage Aries dealt.

The Avatar once again tried to counter, but it didn’t connect! Under the effects of the star of luck, all attacks seemed to be actively avoiding Aries. Nothing even left a scratch. Next, the Avatar attempted to grab Aries, but he’d already shown his hand with Fenix and Hydras.

Aries swiftly swayed backwards, but instead of killing his momentum to stand back up, he simply put a hand to the ground and let the Newtonian force carry him into a flip. After several backflips, a pair of scorpion pincers flew and grabbed the Avatar’s arms as if they were substituting fighters. It was Scorpius’s new weapon given to her by Lufas, already getting a chance to shine.

“Too bad. You’re not the only one who can grab people.” Scorpius stuck out her tongue and licked her purple lips coquettishly before pulling on the weapon with force.

Once the Avatar was close enough, she swiped at him with her claws! After

inflicting him with poison strong enough to even eat away at pure mana, Scorpius kicked him away once again.

Then, it was Aquarius's turn to follow up the attack. The pitcher's manifested body ducked into itself before Ganymedes pointed the opening straight at the Avatar.

"Freeze Duster!" Aquarius's voice rang out from inside the pitcher right before countless chunks of ice started to fly out of the opening.

The speed of these projectiles was utterly incredible. They were being spat out at such speed that it actually didn't even look to be rapid-firing. It was like a wave of ice. Those who couldn't follow the speed of the attack only saw a single large wave. But even though the Avatar was bathed in this storm of ice directly, that didn't stop it from jumping at Aquarius. This time, though, the action had the opposite result. The Avatar's body as well as his attack were sucked towards Karkinos as if he were magnetized. This was one of his skills: Asellus Borealis. The skill allowed him to draw in a single physical attack. In other words, rather than an absolute-evasion skill, it was an anti-absolute accuracy skill.

The Avatar grabbed Karkinos and slammed him into the ground, but he simply got right back up and grabbed the Avatar's head in return, acting out the same attack. Then Karkinos made a regular attack. His long legs whipped around in a kick that made contact with the Avatar's neck, sending his body flying.

"Now, Aries!"

"Leave it to me! Mesarthim version 3!"

Now that the Avatar was off-kilter, Aries sent a rainbow-colored fireball at him without delay. There was no way for the Avatar to dodge. The moment the fireball made contact, the Avatar's mouth twisted into a smile—then he was swallowed by the flames that killed those who were superior.

5

Once Aries's flames disappeared, the Avatar was no longer there. It looked

like the Mesarthim ball had managed to do its job and incinerate him.

Scorpius reacted with, “Well, that was easy,” but that was only a matter of course.

Aquarius had been dealing with Avatars by herself up until now, but this time there were four members of the Twelve Stars with the addition of Aries, Scorpius, and Karkinos. Not to mention that Fenix and Hydras, who had been the opening act, were rather strong as well. In fact, there was no reason this should have been tough at all, so Aquarius had thought this outcome to be pretty much set in stone, and she wasn’t surprised at all.

What did concern her was the expression of the Avatar in its last moments. *Did he...laugh? I thought it was supposed to be a half-asleep Avatar that only wanders around with barely even a conscience?* The Avatar would return fire if it was attacked, but that was something like a self-defense mechanism rather than something done with a clear will or presence of mind, just like how a person’s normal reaction to seeing something flying right at their face is to close their eyes, or like how if someone does something that causes them pain, they’ll immediately withdraw their hand. Basically, it was just an instinctive reaction... It wasn’t something the ouroboros was consciously doing. That was why that had never happened once. The Avatar had never before shown a clear expression.

The ouroboros is sleeping... There’s no doubt about that. The seal hasn’t wavered. Am I reading too deeply into this? Maybe it’s something like smiling in your sleep? Aquarius gave the Ouroboros of Fire a sharp look. It didn’t seem to be moving any time soon. Even now, it still slept soundly.

But I wonder why. Why can’t I get rid of this ominous feeling?

“Hey, Aquarius. Let’s hurry up and leave. There’s nothing left to do here, right?”

Aquarius paused before deciding that, “Yeah. You’re right... Let’s go back up.”

Hurried along by Scorpius, Aquarius started to move back up to the surface. After ordering Ganymedes to carry her, she turned back once more. *It...hasn’t changed.* The ouroboros was still sleeping.

While still feeling that something wasn't quite right, Aquarius didn't let her doubts about the still-sleeping dragon bother her anymore as they left the area. That was why she didn't realize that after they'd left, one of the ouroboros's eyes opened before closing once more.

* *

"Then first, we should discuss next steps."

At the moment, the group gathered in the fairy paradise of Alfheim consisted of the Fairy Princess Pollux, her brother Castor, The Devil King's son Terra, Luna of the Seven Luminaries, and Virgo of the Twelve Stars. On top of that group, Pollux had summoned three strong heroic spirits as guards in case of emergency. They were standing by in the rear.

One was Pavo the Peacock. Apparently, he originally had white wings, but something had possessed him to dye his wings flashy colors and decorate them. As a result, his wings resembled those of a peacock, and he had been exiled from the settlement of heaven-winged he'd been in. He was a man with many shortcomings.

Another was Apse the Bird of Paradise. He was a former heaven-winged adventurer who was proficient in Wood-element heaven-arts, especially those concerning the manipulation of wind. Back in the day, he apparently viewed Lufas, who was also an adventurer, as a rival for a spell, but he ended up realizing the gap between them without having to come to blows, and so he joined her army. He was a slightly pathetic man. As an aside, he was the heaven-winged who had managed to cut Terra's shoulder when he'd fought Pollux.

The last member was Korbous the Crow. Apparently, he also originally had white wings, but he admired Lufas so much that he dyed his own wings black. He was...something.

The three of them were all level 1000, and they had all stuck with Lufas until the end two hundred years ago. They were trustworthy and loyal retainers. There was no need to worry about betrayal with them. Pollux, who they now obeyed, leaned against a tree with her arms crossed and spoke in a low voice.

"There's one thing we need to consider. What will the Goddess do next?"

“U-Umm... Shouldn’t we be considering Miss Lufas’s thoughts on this too?” Virgo hesitantly gave her opinion, unlike Pollux, who was bold.

The subject of their current conversation would affect the future. Virgo had doubts about whether that was something to do without Lufas, who was the most important force in all this.

However, Pollux shook her head. “That won’t be a problem. Miss Lufas herself doesn’t realize it, but she’s already moving with full knowledge of everything. What we’ll be talking about now is just to inform all of you, who don’t know the Goddess well.”

“Umm... Then what about the rest of the Twelve Heavenly Stars?” asked Virgo.

“They aren’t needed either. Rather, they’re all muscle-brained, so telling them anything unnecessary will only have the opposite effect. That goes double for Scorpius and Aigokeros. There’s no telling what those two will do.” Pollux indirectly stated that she didn’t trust the other Twelve Heavenly Stars. That was a little harsh considering that they were comrades and equals, but that cautiousness was what was needed from the brains of the operation.

So you trust them and rely on them because they’re your comrades? I see. What a great thought. I’d even call it beautiful. But unconditional trust also signifies the abandonment of thought and consideration... It’s nothing but pretty-sounding words, Pollux thought.

Not to mention that the Goddess could control people. She could even manipulate their memories. Given that, refusing to doubt was like telling the Goddess to do whatever she wanted. It was something that should never be done. Put bluntly, the only two members of their group who could definitely be said to not be on the Goddess’s side were Lufas and Benetnasch. That did indeed mean that Pollux even doubted herself. There was no proof that she hadn’t been the victim of memory or thought manipulation somewhere along the way. The only two who were completely immune to the Goddess’s tampering were the two mold-breakers who were able to throw off the Goddess’s influence.

“Let’s start with what moves the Goddess has... This we can easily predict.

Rather, at the moment, the only thing she can do is ‘move pieces.’ She can affect the weak parts of people’s hearts and lead them around. She can also possess people and control them, like she did me, or she can call pawns from the other side that she’s prepared beforehand... Those are the three main types of actions she can take, and every single one of them is a subpar move that relies on other people.”

Terra was confused hearing Pollux explain just how few cards the Goddess had to play, so he spoke up. “Isn’t she supposed to be all-knowing and all-powerful?”

The Goddess of Creation Alovenus was omniscient and omnipotent. At least, that was common sense in this world.

However, Pollux responded by shaking her head. “She’s close, but she isn’t truly either of those things. How should I put it...? The scales of our existences are so different that she conversely can’t see. For example, pretend that a world is a grain of sand. Would you be able to see the people’s day-to-day activities or minute actions in that world? If there were some elements in that world that you didn’t like, would you be able to get rid of *just* those parts?” She paused. “It sounds impossible, right?”

Terra considered this quietly for a moment. “True. It does. I’d end up destroying the entire world with a single fingertip.”

“That’s how it is. If the Goddess herself acted, then this world would be destroyed with just one of her fingers or even a single breath. But the Goddess doesn’t want this world gone, so she has to go easier than easy and move tiny, tiny pieces around.”

The revelation was not a good one. In fact, now everyone was even more aware of the scale of the enemy they were picking a fight with.

But Pollux continued on, heedless of the rest of the group’s unrest. “Basically, the Goddess will be a one-trick pony, as always. But we know that her possession and brainwashing won’t work on Lufas and Benetnasch. And not with Taurus either. No matter how much she tries, the result will be the same. Even if she manages to control one of us again, there’s nothing she can do with Lufas and Benetnasch together.”

“Which means she’s going to need an even stronger pawn, right?” asked Terra.

“You’re quick on the uptake. Exactly, and that’s why we’ve been maintaining the seals. We’ve taken the initiative and sealed the strongest pieces the Goddess has, the ouroboroses. With that, her options are limited.”

At the moment, the options the Goddess had to choose from were shockingly few. All of the ouroboroses other than the Moon were sealed. On top of that, the fairy siblings, who had originally been on the Goddess’s side, had been taken in by Lufas along with Parthenos and Aquarius, so now the Goddess only had three hands to play: the devilfolk, the Ouroboros of the Moon, and her avatar.

Out of those, the devilfolk could not be relied upon. Even if she managed to brainwash Luna, her strength was not enough to take on even Castor by himself, and Lufas could simply wipe out all of the devilfolk, even if they tried to attack her all at once. The only devilfolk at level 1000, Terra, was not one of the Goddess’s spells and thus couldn’t be used. In other words, all they had to be wary of was either the Moon ouroboros or the Goddess’s avatar, Dina.

Still, the possibility of the devilfolk taking action shouldn’t be completely discounted just yet, Pollux thought as she looked over at Luna.

“Well... I’m pretty sure it won’t happen, but you should be careful just in case. The chance that you’re being manipulated isn’t nothing, after all.”

“Y-Yes.”

“But if she’d bother to control you, she might as well go after me, in my opinion. So you shouldn’t be too worried about it,” Pollux said as she looked down at her own fingers.

Of course, Pollux had plans in place for if she was ever controlled. At the moment, she was wearing the ring with the skill-sealing ability that had been given to her by Lufas, and she was unable to use Argonautai. Not only that, but the ring was also cursed by Aigokeros, making it so she couldn’t remove it on her own. Either Lufas had to remove it herself or she needed permission from one of the other Twelve Stars. All that added together to mean that there was no point in manipulating Pollux.

Lufas had said, “To think that a masochistic item meant for restricted play actually came in handy...” But the item would be pretty useful anywhere. Also, the item doubled received experience in exchange for sealing skills.

“So, as for the Moon ouroboros...” Pollux was silent for a moment. “I might as well be candid. You know the Devil King? He’s the Moon ouroboros. He’s also been the one to kill the hero for generations, whether that be as the Beast God, the Wicked God, the Titan, or the Great Demon King.”

Terra was dumbfounded, unable to form words after Pollux’s confession before finally letting out a “What?”

Luna and Virgo were also wide eyed. Castor looked grim, as if he’d been reminded of something unpleasant. This hardly mattered, but he hadn’t been informed of the Devil King’s true identity by Pollux.

“Also, my brother and I are avatars of the Wood ouroboros. Of course, it’s been a long time since we’ve awakened our egos and become fairies, so we’re basically completely different at this point.”

“Are you sure it’s all right to tell us that?” asked Terra.

“It’s not really something that needs to be hidden.”

It was only natural for Terra to react with disbelief at how easily Pollux outed herself. How could he be expected to predict that a representative of the Goddess and an avatar of a dragon would be right in front of them?

Luna was the one who showed a certain measure of shock at that truth.

“You... You should be the opposite of the Devil King... If you’re both on the same side, then...”

Pollux was silent for some time before finally saying, “That stuff’s just a charade passed around people on the same side. It’s an easy-to-understand heroic tale written by the Goddess... Orm and I are split as enemy and friend, and we’ve just repeated that for several million years.”

Hearing Pollux strain to even get that out had Luna discard what she was going to say and just close her mouth. All the faith of the people up until now. The stories of great people from the past. The symbol of light, who posed the

biggest threat to the devilfolk. None of that actually existed. All of it was just a show, a comedy even. Everybody was faithfully acting out a role.

“And the newest story started two hundred years ago. The Goddess, perceiving Lufas as a threat, an enemy of the story, set her up as the final boss and set Alioth and his group against her.”

“That’s the truth of two hundred years ago... Once you unravel the strings, it’s not even a heroic tale, just a farce.”

Terra’s opinion mirrored that of Venus, when she had disappeared from in front of him before. *Puppet... That’s what she called Luna. She said that Luna was a pitiful puppet that didn’t even know she was just someone’s toy. I see. Now that I know the truth, she’s right.*

The Goddess simply had Pollux and the Devil King take their places, using them and the game pieces called the devilfolk and fairies as continuously opposing forces of light and dark to put on an act. Now that Terra knew all of this, he couldn’t think anything other than “puppet show.” Even the Seven Heroes were nothing more than actors made to dance to the Goddess’s tune. The only ones who weren’t like that were Lufas and Benetnasch.

Terra’s thoughts stalled for a moment. *No, now that I think about it, there was someone who said something interesting... “Just like I once was.” Doesn’t that sound like that didn’t apply to her anymore? Isn’t that strange? I mean, Venus, or Dina, is the Goddess’s avatar, so wouldn’t she be the dictionary definition of the Goddess’s puppet? Then why did she say something like that...?*

“Ah, now that I think about it, how’s Orm been doing?” Pollux asked. “I haven’t seen him recently.”

“You say his name so easily. Are you two close?”

“You could say that, though it’s more like...we’re just stuck with each other? You might forget, but we’ve kind of been in this relationship for millions of years, you know? Sometimes he’ll just show up out of the blue, and we’ll have tea, then he’ll just go back. Hmm, yeah. I guess I don’t really hate him, though.”

It was almost unthinkable for the Fairy Princess and the Devil King, who were thought to be worse than mortal enemies, to actually have this sort of

relationship. If Kross, with his weak mental fortitude, were to hear this, he'd probably faint because of his common sense being challenged.

As she spoke, Pollux suddenly derailed herself, saying, "Now that I think about it..."

It was always a given that Orm would come here, and I get the feeling he always came when I was depressed from sending heroes off to their deaths. Thinking back on it now, he was probably worried about me in his own way.

"Anyway, let's get back on topic and talk about what the Goddess will do next. Now that Miss Lufas has her forces in order, she has to be careful about what piece to move, or it won't do anything. This means the Goddess should be thinking that it's about time to move the ouroboroses. In other words, the Goddess should be planning to undo the seals around them next. I'd bet on her first target being the Ouroboros of Heaven, which is the most lightly guarded. The one that's in Vanaheim."

The ouroboroses were sealed in four places. Out of those, Earth was held down by Taurus while Fire was being controlled by Aquarius, and they would be hard to attack. Meanwhile, the Wood ouroboros was being held down by Pollux and her group, so the last one, and the most lightly guarded, was the one in Vanaheim. Parthenos, who had been sealing it, had already long since departed, so she couldn't fight. *As a ghost, she can scare people, but that's about it, so the Goddess will be aiming for the Ouroboros of Heaven.* At least, that was what Pollux thought she would do if she were in the Goddess's shoes.

Yes, Pollux thought.

"That was good deductive thinking, but you're a little off. I'm actually starting with the Wood ouroboros."

Castor and Terra gasped in alarm at the sudden appearance of the new voice, while Luna cried, "Who—?!" They all turned their heads to face the direction the new voice came from as they reached for their weapons.

They laid eyes on a tall man with long, white hair, who seemed to simply not care how wary they were as he kept walking. His eyes were golden with vertically slit pupils. On top of that, his skin was blue, the telltale sign of a devilfolk.

Seeing the man, Luna raised her voice in surprise. “You’re...Sol?!”

He was the last member of the devilfolk’s Seven Luminaries, Sol of the Sun. He should have been level 300, but Terra sensed that he was facing down a powerful enemy the likes of which he’d never fought before, and he silently stepped forward.



6

A little before that.

The setting was a barren wasteland the likes of which humans didn't approach. No, not just humans. Both monsters and devilfolk also never got near "his" territory. That was because they knew that if they got too close, it didn't matter what excuses they strung together; they would be eaten without exception. All the unfortunate victims who hadn't understood that and got too close had been turned to meatless corpses before eventually degrading in the winds as they were exposed to nature.

The one man standing in the middle of this wasteland was the area's master... He was called a walking catastrophe and was said to possess the highest combat potential among all the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars: the Lion King Leon. His eyes were closed as he thought back to his defeat a scant few days ago and asked himself, "What am I missing?"

My level's been maxed at 1000 for a long time now. No matter how many people I eat, it doesn't even raise in the slightest. I'm unable to break past the wall set by the Goddess, but the wall is breakable. It definitely is. Lufas and Benetnasch proved that it's possible; they've gone off before me. So what's different? Just what is the difference between them and me? What am I missing?

If it was talent...then Leon knew he was above those two for natural-born talent, enough that it wouldn't even be a contest. Lufas and Benetnasch definitely qualified as geniuses, or maybe child prodigies, in Leon's book, but that still couldn't be compared to Leon, who was born at level 1000. They were clearly inferior.

It's the difference between someone who was born the strongest and those who weren't. There's no way I lose to them. There's no way I'm lower than them. But the fact is that Lufas and Benetnasch got ahead of me; they're above

me right now.

I hate that from the bottom of my heart. I won't stand for it. Why? Why can't I get past this wall? Why can't I go past level 1000?

The more Leon thought about it the less he felt he knew, leaving behind only an unreasonable, targetless anger. Leon flexed his log-like arms, making the veins in them pop up as he punched a nearby mountain in his irritation. His literally inhuman power crushed the rock, breaking down a sizable rock mountain to dust. But Leon wasn't satisfied, because he was made to realize that he was lacking.

No, not like this. I can't become "someone who's forged ahead" with just this. They can destroy planets. I can't do that. Benetnasch can easily rip her way through this world and reach the other side. I can't do that. Lufas can turn entire planets to ash with a single magic spell. I can't do that.

Even though Leon shouldn't have been lagging behind them in power, there was a gap in the destruction they were capable of. There was a wall, a wall separating those who had surpassed the limits and those who hadn't. It was a wall of a mere single level, separating those between levels 1000 and 1001. As long as Leon couldn't surpass that wall, he would forever be bound by the damage limits set by the world. No matter how far he stretched his stats, he would never be able to reach that peak.

Not only that, but there was a certain cheating crab who could ignore that limit even though he was only level 800. For some reason, Leon was reminded of his existence as the thought passed straight into his brain.

"DAAAAAMMNN IIIIITTT! IS THIS ALL I AMOUNT TO?! IS THIS MY LIMIIIIITTT?!"

"Looks like you're having a hard time."

Leon suddenly heard a voice from behind him. Surprised, he responded instinctively, turning around and punching. That simple punch carried with it a destructive blast of wind pressure which radiated out behind Leon, shaving away at the land.

If someone stepped into his territory, there would be no hesitation. They

were all nothing but trash that needed to be cleaned up. However, even after taking that attack, the invader didn't even waver. He simply stood there with a cool expression and his arms crossed.

After a moment's pause, Leon said, "Who're you?"

When Leon turned around, he saw a man with long, white hair. His skin was blue, and his eyes were golden with vertically slit pupils. Leon could tell at a glance that he was devilfolk, but at the same time, he felt something was off. *What is up with this guy? For a devilfolk, he seems really odd.* He could feel something holy in the man, and it made Leon feel extremely unpleasant. He was also annoyed that his attack just now couldn't move the man, and the fact that he'd managed to get so close without Leon noticing set off alarms in his head.

"It is good to meet you, Lion King. My name is Sol... Sol the Sun seat of the devilfolk's Seven Luminaries. Of course, I don't really like the moniker of 'Sun.' It's not beautiful. First off, I don't appreciate that it overlaps with Mars's Fire, so please refer to me as...heaven... Yes, Sol of the Heavens!"

"Seven Luminaries? What a letdown. They're just a bunch of small fry."

"Now that's harsh. But I can't really deny it. A rabble of level 300s would certainly look like weaklings to you... They probably wouldn't even be worth dealing with."

The white man—Sol—didn't seem to be fazed by the insult as he continued on with a thin smile. He seemed full of confidence, and Leon just didn't think that was the way one of the Seven Luminaries would act against the Lion King. That weirdness had Leon hesitating where he would normally immediately assault the man. Something inside him was sounding the alarm, saying that Sol was somehow dangerous.

"But I hope you can forgive their weakness. They weren't born weak because they wanted to. They were made to be weaker so as not to wipe out humanity. They're a pretty sad people. Don't you think that as someone strong you should magnanimously accept the weak?"

"You talk as if you're different."

“I am. I truly am.” Sol laughed daringly—and then he disappeared.

At that moment, Leon felt a kick to his gut, one powerful enough to easily go through the armor that was his abs. Leon could feel the contents of his stomach coming back up. With just one kick he was blown into the air and through several rocky mountains, traveling several kilometers in an instant. As Leon got up, Sol was suddenly there with his arms crossed, landing with composure.

“Well, that’s me. What do you think of my kick? I hope you’re satisfied with it.”

Leon reached his already low boiling point in an instant. “You fucker!” He closed in on the man in a mere moment, and threw out a punch.

Sol blocked Leon’s punch with a single arm, but he wasn’t able to take the full force of it and was sent backwards. While he didn’t fall, the man did slide, his feet gouging two furrows into the ground as he did so.

But as Sol looked at his numb arm, his smile only deepened. “That was a good one. It’s been a while since I’ve felt an attack like that.”

“Keep talking, trash!”

Leon once again leapt forth, closing the gap between them, but this time Sol leapt as well. Their punches clashed, and so did their knees. The shock waves from their clash spread out in a circle around them, whipping up a fierce windstorm with them at the center. After some time spent pushing at each other, Sol lost the contest of strength and was pushed back, but that didn’t seem to concern him at all.

Th-This damn...! thought Leon.

“So you’re a little above me in pure power. Then what about speed?”

Sol sent out a flurry of punches and kicks. In order to defend himself, Leon did the same, whipping up a storm-like flurry of blows. The attacks crossed the space between them like rain. Punches, kicks, pokes, parries, redirects, blocks, and dodges were all thrown out in this hand-to-hand battle that was so far proving even. But they only stayed that way for a couple seconds. The balance quickly crumbled, and Sol was forced to retreat. He was being overwhelmed by the Lion King’s fierce attacks, which made full use of his crushing power and

speed.

“As expected. You’re faster as well.”

“And you weren’t as strong as you talked yourself up to be!”

“I wonder?”

Leon was a step above in both power and speed, but Sol took advantage of a small opening in their exchange, and a straight punch to Leon’s jaw sent him flying. Sol overtook Leon as he soared through the air, dropping an axe kick in midair! Leon was forced into the ground, creating a crater. Sol once again chased after him, rapidly descending.

He threw out a knife-hand strike at Leon, who was just standing up. However, Leon seemed to disappear for a moment, and the attack hit nothing but air. Sol calmly shifted his head to the side, and an instant later, Leon’s punch sailed through where his head had been, grazing Sol’s cheek.

Leon had made use of his speed to round to Sol’s back and attack, but he’d read that like a book and avoided it. The wind from Leon’s punch gouged out the earth as it continued on, making the ground seem like soft sand that had had a line drawn through it by a shovel. Of course, the ground was nowhere near that soft, which went to show just how insanely powerful Leon’s punches were.

But power only mattered if the attacks connected. Without turning around, Sol grabbed Leon’s arm and threw the man over his shoulder. Having sent Leon into the air, where there was no purchase, Sol reacted quickly and held out his hand while gathering mana in the palm.

“Raahhh!”

He was preparing the Sun element spell “Photon Buster.” The name of the spell said it all; the spell was simply a cannon that fired the pure light of mana. The spell’s beam was wide enough to swallow Leon’s entire body, and while he was unable to dodge, the spell’s extreme light made contact with the Lion King and caused an explosion.

But Sol didn’t stop there. He once again disappeared, moving at a speed so high people could mistake him for teleporting as he caught up to the falling Lion

King and grabbed him by the hair. Then Sol put a knee into his face! Leon swiped at Sol with his claws in return, but Sol dodged it and once again grabbed Leon's arm, turning the dodge into a throw.

The throw put Leon halfway inside a nearby boulder while Sol once again held out his arm.

“Photon Rain!”

Bullets of light came out of Sol's palm like a heavy rain. They all hit Leon mercilessly, exploding as they made contact and shaving away at the Lion King's HP.

There was no compromise, no holding back. Sol knew that vitality was Leon's strong point, so in order to actually finish the man off, Sol needed to throw out magic like rain. But the amount of magic he was putting out was still strange. Even if the spell he used was perfect for rapid fire, it was like he was made out of infinite magic power with the amount he was firing it. Sol continued to fire as if he knew he'd never run out, pushing Leon further and further to the edge.

“This is the end. Take it!”

Sol touched his wrists together and held them out. The simple act of gathering power before unleashing the spell already shook the air around him, making the small rocks and pebbles that were loose in the area float as if there was no gravity. By putting out so much energy, Sol had given himself sufficient gravitational pull to effectively cancel out the planet's gravity in this localized area. Sparks and lightning flew from Sol's body as more and more mana pooled into his hands.

“Disintegrate!”

He cast the Sun element spell “Photon Smasher.” It was a higher-tier version of Photon Shooter, and while its area of effect was much smaller, it boasted much higher damage than Lufas's favorite spell, Solar Flare. Of course, this was only considering the spell's inherent effects and ignoring the caster's abilities. Things would be much different if compared to a Solar Flare fired by Lufas, but that wasn't relevant at the moment. More importantly, that didn't change the fact that the spell had abnormal destructive power.

The unleashed torrent of light burst through Mizgarz's atmosphere beautifully, setting off on a journey away from its mother planet. With fights of this level, it was a common sight, but the fact that multiple monsters like this even existed in this world was absurd. There was a huge line carved into Mizgarz, and Sol watched the smoke rise as he crossed his arms.

It...doesn't look like Leon is coming out.

Sol waited silently before eventually wondering aloud, "Is he dead? That was a lot simpler than I was expecting. Or maybe he just didn't live up to the rumors?"

Even after all the smoke dissipated, Leon was nowhere to be found. So he either was completely incinerated in that blast, or he got sent flying somewhere... Or maybe he just turned tail and ran? But it doesn't matter which one it is. Either way, it ends with him not being as impressive as I expected.

Sol sighed. "What a letdown. I thought I'd finally get to have a good fight, but... Leon the Lion King? What an overblown name. With how strong he was, it looks like I won't be able to expect much from the other Twelve Heavenly Stars either," Sol muttered to himself, seeming somewhat bored.

Then, he flew away without looking back.

With that, I now know the difference in power. There's no point in wasting any more time. He might be alive, but that doesn't matter. Either way, he's not a threat. It's just unfortunate that if that's all the "strongest" amounts to, it doesn't seem like the other Twelve Heavenly Stars will be worth much either.

As I thought. About the only opponents I'll be able to have fun with will be Lufas Maphaahl and Benetnasch. Maybe I should just head straight for them?

He contemplated this quietly for a long while before seeming to speak up out of nowhere, "Yeah, yeah. I know. Don't worry. I should finish my job first, right? It's honestly boring, but I'll take care of that first. The main dish can come later," Sol spoke.

It looked like he was talking to someone, but there was no one to be found, so it also looked like he was talking to himself.

"The Ouroboros of Fire is... He's always been a light sleeper. I can probably

just leave him alone. For now, if I just relay your orders to the Wood and then Earth ouroboroses, you'll be able to activate them all at once. Still, Lufas Maphaahl... Heh heh, what a character. She finally forced the Goddess to commit the ouroboroses."

Sol flew, making a beeline towards his destination. He was flying towards Alfheim, the place where the Wood ouroboros slept.

"The most troublesome one has to be the Moon ouroboros... I have no idea what he's thinking, but it doesn't seem to align with the Goddess's will. Even I'd have a hard time ending him. Well, that would be fun too though."

The last of the Seven Luminaries smiled fearlessly as he finally arrived at his destination: Alfheim.

Looks like there's a barrier to ward off intruders... Who cares though? Sol busted straight through the barrier by simply flying headlong into it. Of course, the barrier pushed back, but that didn't mean anything. Sol flew through the barrier like it was tissue paper and landed in front of Pollux and her group.

The actual members present were a little surprising, but that didn't change what Sol had to do, and it didn't make him any less sure of his victory. After all, there was a large gap between him and them that was almost impossible to fill.

7

The Seven Luminaries were a group formed of the devilfolk's elite in order to take over and oppress humanity—at least, that was the outward reason for this gathering of weaklings. Sure, humanity considered the Seven Luminaries strong; entire knight brigades couldn't stand up to one. However, they were still a far, far cry from true monstrous strength. Even if Mars, Mercurius, Jupiter, and Saturnus had been here along with Luna, all five of them combined wouldn't even have been able to match Castor by himself.

That was exactly why, even if one of the Seven Luminaries showed up now, they wouldn't pose any threat. Their time on the stage had long since passed, and they were now no more than bit parts... At least, that was how it should

have been.

But Castor reflexively reached for his weapon and took up a stance, and he wasn't the only one. Terra, Pollux, and the heroic spirits behind her all took up fighting stances and made their wariness known.

Facing them, the white man—Sol—grinned sharply.

"Let's start with introductions, shall we? I am Sol of Heaven, one of the Seven Luminaries. I preside over the Sun element. It is an honor to meet you, my cousins," Sol said in his low and refined voice, referring to the twins, Pollux and Castor.

Of course, the two of them had no idea what he was talking about. As avatars of an ouroboros, they had never had any relatives in the first place, much less among the devilfolk. Somewhere in their hearts, they felt that he was correct, though, and they could only wonder why. Somehow, they could feel something from him that was also inside them.

"And you too, Terra. You also qualify to be my cousin. You are a very similar existence to ours."

"I have no idea what you're on about..." Terra said, trailing off. "What did you come here for, Sol?"

To Terra, Sol was just one of his subordinates, and someone who wasn't trustworthy at the moment. After all, he was the one who had brought the traitor Venus along in the first place, so Terra considered him to be a puppet of Venus—or Dina. He had most likely either been subjected to memory manipulation or thought control, at least by Terra's reckoning.

However, Terra was now slowly starting to think that his assumption was incredibly wrong. The reason for that was that the current Sol had an absolutely undeniable presence and eeriness about him that hadn't existed back when Sol had been working as his subordinate.

"What if I said I was here to slap the ouroboros awake?"

"Wha—?!"

"Well, taking advantage of that, I have something else to confess. I'm on the

Goddess's side, rather than the Devil King's. I do feel sorry that I deceived you, but that was the job. Please don't hold it against me."

Sol easily revealed his goals with a carefree and relaxed smile. It was a show of his absolute confidence in their inability to stop him, even if they knew. At that moment, Terra finally truly realized that he had completely misjudged this man who had worked under him.

"I could just go do that right now, but then probably none of you would be able to keep up and realize what happened. Would you all like an explanation of what I'm about to do?"

There was only a pensive silence. Then Terra said, "How kind of you."

"Heh heh. I'm a kind person, though I might not look it. And I'll take that as a yes."

After that shamelessly bold line, Sol looked over everyone else there. There were only five people in their group at a high level: Castor, Terra, and the three heaven-winged heroic spirits. So, everyone other than Pollux and Virgo. But knowing that didn't seem to shake Sol's confidence one bit.

"Ah, of course... I don't mind if you try to sneak in a preemptive attack while I'm talking. You might even catch me off guard," Sol said, his gaze squarely on Apse, who was standing in the back.

Apse held on to a knife, hiding it behind him, but that was easily seen through. As soon as Apse realized that, he stopped in his tracks.

"Oh, you're not coming? Maybe you're a bit nervous in the service?"

"Stop stalling," said Terra. "You said you were going to talk, right?"

"Ah, right. Sorry about that," said Sol, having been urged along. "Okay, let's see... Why not start from the beginning...?"

Sol crossed his arms and closed his eyes as he tried to recall details of the past. He seemed full of openings like that, but no one tried to take advantage of them because they knew that he was making himself seem that way to bait them.

Eventually, Sol opened his eyes once more and started to speak. "The

devilfolk's Seven Luminaries... There's Luna the Moon seat, Mars the Fire seat, Mercurius the Water seat, Jupiter the Wood seat, Venus the Metal seat, Saturnus the Earth seat, and me...Sol of Heaven. As you probably already suspect, two of that number, however... Venus and I are not normal devilfolk. Venus isn't even a devilfolk; she's a half-elf. Ah, I'll mention this now: Saturnus is an actual devilfolk and has nothing to do with us, so don't cast suspicions on her. Also, there's really no point in hiding this, so I'll tell you all straight up: I am an avatar of the Ouroboros of Heaven. The technical title is 'Sun,' but that kind of overlaps with 'Fire,' so please take care to say Heaven instead."

Terra was silent for a moment, then muttered, "What?"

Everyone there swallowed their breaths in response to Sol's easy admission of his own identity.

There were five divine monsters that represented the Goddess. They were all dragons, and out of the five, a piece of one of them was right in front of Pollux and her group. There was no way they wouldn't be surprised. At the same time, they understood what he meant when he'd referred to some of them as "cousins" before. He was the same as Pollux and Castor. He was an avatar split off from an ouroboros, and he had gained an independent ego. The only thing that was different was that his goals still ran parallel to those of his original parent dragon.

"As avatars who have awakened our own personalities, I suppose it would be more accurate to call us their children. In that sense, you are also the same as us, Terra."

Terra considered this quietly for a moment. "So I've been deceived all this time, huh? Such incompetence. It makes me hate myself."

"No need to self-deprecate like that. In fact, I'd say you've done really well to even be able to suspect Venus and me while still under her thought manipulation. Also, while my creator may be different, I'm still undoubtedly a devilfolk. It would have been almost impossible to see through to my real identity." Sol spoke quietly as he threw a glance at Luna.

Luna responded with a wary glare, but of course that didn't affect Sol at all.

After another contemplative pause, Terra asked, "Does my father know about

this?”

“Oh, well, who could say? He’s a crafty old man. He might have known who I was this whole time and just let me do as I pleased anyway.”

“And your goal in infiltrating the Seven Luminaries?”

“Venus wanted to control the devilfolk from the inside. I came to keep an eye on the Devil King. You see...the Seven Luminaries were actually made as a cover for the two of us. You’re the one who set it all up, but we made you do that.”

Terra’s expression grew more grim and stern as he thought back to when he had created the Seven Luminaries. *Back then... Yeah, back then I really was out of it somehow. I feel like I was drunk all the time or something. Now that I think about it, I was probably already in Venus’s clutches by then. I never even thought to doubt the girl that Sol brought out of nowhere, and she looked nothing like a devilfolk.*

There was nothing scarier than being manipulated with no knowledge of it. Back then, there had also been an almost-insurmountable gap in standing between Terra and Luna, who had just been an underling. No matter how much Terra had wanted Luna to be beside him, or how much Luna had wanted to do the same, the difference in their statuses wouldn’t allow it. But at that point, pretty much all the elites of the devilfolk had been killed by Lufas, so Luna had been granted a seat, which was a great stroke of luck.

That was when they’d struck. They hadn’t done much. This situation had mostly been brought on by Terra’s horniness.

“Just like that, Venus continued to control the devilfolk from the inside while I played the unremarkable man and blended in as a jester, just like the rest of the Seven Luminaries.”

“Why did you need to keep watch over my father?” Terra asked.

“That’s a good question. You see, Terra, your father decided to ignore the Goddess’s script.”

That line had Terra raising his brows. He didn’t say anything, but it was clear he was slightly shaken.

“Two hundred years ago...” Sol trailed off. “The story should have ended back then. The Seven Heroes should have defeated the devilfolk at the cost of their lives, and the devilfolk should have faded into obscurity with their defeat.”

This time, Terra couldn't keep quiet. “What?!” What Sol had said was entirely out of left field; there was no way for Terra to ever have expected this.

Pollux's face looked stern. It seemed his answer was out of line with her thinking as well. She was silent for a moment before asking, “Cornering humanity like this wasn't in the Goddess's scenario?”

“Of course it was, but there was meant to be a short breather. Just like how it's been repeated in the past, the evil Devil King should have left the stage along with all of his underlings, the devilfolk. But that didn't happen. The Seven Heroes, who should have died, survived instead. The devilfolk also continued on. This silly farce of a play continued instead of ending.”

After hearing the answer to her question, Pollux put her hand to her jaw and sunk into thought. *Orm... Just what is that man thinking? He's never stretched out this farce more than needed... Just what did he stand to gain from extending this? What could that man possibly want to do enough to buy the Goddess's ire? What is his goal?* Pollux considered the answer to her question. *I just can't see any merits to be had from the Devil King going that far.*

“Of course, the Goddess did ask him first. ‘What are you doing?’ Right? And this was how he replied. ‘I didn't have enough leeway to act and treat the Seven Heroes and the others as the script demanded. I ended up going all out.’ And I mean, they stormed his palace with unprecedented numbers of level 1000s, which is a level only the select few chosen by the Goddess can reach every thousand or ten thousand or so years. It made sense, but the Goddess felt a tinge of doubt, so she sent me to keep watch.”

As he spoke, Sol uncrossed his arms. Seeing that, Terra and the others were quick to take up battle stances, but it seemed he still didn't intend to attack just yet.

“After that, he was obedient for a while. He let up just enough so as to not wipe out humanity, all while cornering them and scaring them as much as possible. But in the end, the Goddess's misgivings were correct. The truth came

out in the battle the other day. He revealed the script to Lufas Maphaahl in that fight.”

“Just what is Orm thinking?” Pollux wondered aloud.

“I don’t know either. What I do know is that he is in full rebellion towards the Goddess. With no pieces to move against Lufas Maphaahl, and with Orm in full rebellion—not to mention Lufas’s forces being ever-increasing thanks to Pollux and the other Twelve Heavenly Stars—the Goddess finally resolved to play her strongest pieces,” Sol said as he gathered his mana.

The time for talk was over. That was probably what this signaled. Though he could have just attacked without making a show of it, he instead had clearly signaled that the fight was starting. Whether that was because he wanted a straight and honest fight or because he underestimated them was unclear. Either way, it didn’t change what was about to happen.

Terra drew his sword while Castor and the others stepped forward.

“Now then, do you understand now? If you do, I’d like to start, so...” Sol said, provocative. “If there’s anything else, you should speak now. I’ll even wait until you finish casting buffing heaven-arts.”

“Don’t underestimate us!” The ones who took his bait were the heroic spirits in the back. They leapt, landing in front of Terra as all three of them readied their swords.

“We are knights who have sworn loyalty to Lady Lufas! Pavo the Peacock!”

“Apse the Bird of Paradise!”

“And Korbous the Crow! There is no need for Sir Castor to even act! Let’s go, Formation A!”

“No, let’s go with B here!” said Pavo.

“We don’t have anything like that!” exclaimed Aps.

“Then C!” said Korbous.

“Okay!”

The three heaven-winged took flight, fiercely attacking Sol.

Sol defended against their strikes, laughing sarcastically as he also took to the air. The three spirits followed him, attacking him from different sides at the same time, but Sol just blocked using both hands and a leg. Not just that, but Sol also gathered mana around himself before releasing it, using the blast wave to send the three knights flying.

Just like that, Sol immediately charged in. He landed a kick on Korbous, who had yet to recover, striking him in the jaw before seamlessly following up with an axe kick, sending the spirit crashing into the ground. When the other two slashed at him from behind, he quickly turned around and grabbed both of their blades with his fingertips.

Pavo was stunned into silence.

“Grk! You...” said Apse.

“What’s wrong? I’m not gripping all that hard, you know.”

With just the strength of his fingertips, Sol threw the two knights, swords and all, before seeming to teleport to Apse and kick him downward. Like flowing water, he immediately comboed that into thrusting a palm at Pavo and unleashing explosive fire at him.

The battle had only lasted a scant several seconds. Actually, leaving out all the conversation and counting only the exchange of blows, the fight didn’t even last a single second. To Virgo and Pollux, it literally was only an instant.

While seeing the three heroic spirits sent into the ground in basically an instant, Terra felt nothing but dread. *This man... He’s not all talk. He’s really strong.*

“Now then, who’s next?”

While purposefully ignoring Virgo, who was healing the three knights on the ground, Sol casually and loosely looked over at Terra and the others.

The three knights were in no way weak. While they were simply regular level 1000s, unlike the stats of Lufas or the Seven Heroes, their levels themselves already placed them at the top of the pile in terms of strength. They were monstrously strong people who could single-handedly destroy entire civilizations. If they ever felt like it, they could turn Mizgarz into a wasteland

planet uninhabitable by life in just a few days. And they were elites who could give Terra trouble. Dealing with three of them at once was no mean feat. At a rough estimate, the three of them were able to equal Lufas or Leon in their normal state at the very least.

However, the group's strongest member, Terra, wasn't much different from a single one of the knights who had just lost, so engaging Sol with only two effective knights instead of three was just dangerous. In order for Terra to fight evenly here, he would either need some powerful buffs, or Sol would need some powerful debuffs. Unfortunately, there was no one in the group who could use such spells. Virgo's would be insufficient.

It would be possible for Pollux to kill him with sheer numbers thanks to Argonautai, but there was the possibility of the Goddess possessing her as soon as she took off the ring, so she couldn't resort to that. If Pollux were to fall under the Goddess's control now, it would be game over for all of them, so they could only fight with the heroic spirits she summoned while someone like Lufas, who could suppress her immediately even if she was to be possessed, was present... Luckily, she had already summoned the perfect spirit for this situation.

"I'm next."

There was the sound of something heavy hitting the floor. At the same time, a young-looking girl's voice rang out. However, her manner of speech was far too old for her voice, and when everyone turned around, they saw a small, green-haired girl. She had a log from the Wood ouroboros's tree in her hands, and her mouth was curved in an upwards arc.

Her form was eminently recognizable by Virgo. She could never forget it. It was the young form of her grandma, whom she loved and respected, as well as someone who was no longer there.

Virgo was stunned into silence before finally managing to stutter, "G-Grandma?"

She was one of the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars, the former Maiden, Parthenos.

“I’ll be joining the team searching for the reincarnation method, of course. If I’m not there, they’ll probably get nowhere, after all.” Pollux paused. “Also, there’s something I’m concerned about.” That was what Pollux had said back when the teams were split.

Back then, Pollux didn’t dig into it too deeply, but she had something she wanted to check out as soon as possible. Depending on the result, it was something that could dismantle Lufas’s plan that had started two hundred years ago right from the foundations. So, they moved back to the fairies’ paradise of Alfheim. There, before Pollux started talking about avatars, she’d separated from the group just once.

The heroic spirits that she had summoned in Lufas’s presence were Fenix, Hydras, the three knights, and “*her*,” who easily slipped into the revival. After reading the room, though, she quickly left and was now in Alfheim. As expected, once Pollux had separated herself from the group, she easily found the young girl’s form leaning against a tree. Her braided hair was green. She wore white robes, and she seemed young, no older than twelve. As soon as she noticed Pollux, she grinned widely.

“It’s been a while, has it not, Pollux?”

“Yes, it has...Parthenos.”

She was Parthenos, the Maiden of the former generation. She, whose life had finally ended a year ago, was now manifested in her prime. While she looked young, she was, incredibly, over two hundred years old. Rather than just being an old woman, she was already basically a fossil. Because Argonautai summoned spirits at their prime, she’d come back in her form from over two hundred years ago when she had been a pillar of the Twelve Stars. Of course, if Pollux wanted to, she could have summoned Parthenos in her old form, but she probably hadn’t because she was also a woman.

“So, what do you need? I’m happy to be young again after so long, but I have my duty to protect the seal. If possible, I’d like to go back to where I was before.”

“I want to ask you about the seal.” Pollux narrowed her eyes, giving Parthenos a sharp look. “Say, Parthenos. You... Why did you allow the Goddess’s avatar to pass?”

Parthenos was silent for a moment before saying, “Oh ho. To think she was already mixed into the party back then. That was an oversight...”

“Don’t play with me. You might be able to fool Miss Lufas, but not me. I’d appreciate it if you didn’t look down on me like that.”

Pollux wanted to confirm something, something that had to do with when Parthenos had allowed Dina, who had visited Vanaheim with Lufas and her group, through. Pollux saw this as Parthenos, who had once been the guardian of the Goddess’s sanctuary, allowing Dina, who was a similar existence to her, to pass.

But that was strange. It just was. After all, the ouroboros was a representative of the Goddess, and the seal was there to stop it from waking up. Even so, Parthenos let someone through who was basically the Goddess. It was like putting the cart before the horse. There would have been no point in keeping up a barrier at all. In other words, letting Dina into the barrier could not be like the reason why Lufas had let Dina go... Parthenos had let Dina through with full knowledge.

“Also, one more thing. You had control of the Goddess’s Sanctuary. There’s no way you don’t know what the Goddess looks like. Even if you made a mistake before and let her into the seal, or if she managed to somehow slip through on her own... There’s no way you didn’t realize who she was the second you laid eyes on her.”

Parthenos remained silent.

Pollux wouldn’t allow for excuses or deceptions. *Answer me, Parthenos.* Parthenos could tell that’s what Pollux was saying with her gaze, so she raised both her hands to signal surrender. Other people aside, Parthenos decided she couldn’t continue to deceive Pollux.

“Well done, Pollux. You were right about everything. I knew who she was, and I let her through on purpose. But it looks like even you didn’t manage to see her true form behind her true form.”

Pollux paused, before asking, “What do you mean?”

“Don’t you dare let anyone else know this. Especially those with loose lips.”

Then, Parthenos started to speak. She explained exactly why she’d let Dina through, who she was, and what her plan was, as well as why Lufas trusted her so implicitly. Parthenos told Pollux why, even after it had been revealed that Dina was deceiving Lufas, she still couldn’t think of Dina as an enemy.

Yes, there was no way Lufas had done all of that with no thought at all. There was a reason she did not see Dina as an enemy. Deep in the farthest reaches of Lufas’s consciousness, there was an ephemeral memory that she was just barely able to unconsciously hold on to, and with that Lufas “knew” that Dina was no enemy.

Having heard that, Pollux at first couldn’t believe it. However, eventually everything made sense to her.

She digested the information, saying nothing for a while before finally admitting, “I see. That does make sense, I guess. I definitely thought it was strange... No matter how simply Lufas thinks, she was being led around weirdly easily. But yes, now everything makes a sort of sense.”

“You still seem rather unsatisfied, though?”

“Yes, I am. I wasn’t told everything. I just felt I was pathetic.”

“Well, that can’t be helped. In the worst case, you could have had your memories read by the Goddess. There was a need to at least keep the most important parts a secret.”

“I know that. Still, I can’t help but feel that way.”

Pollux was embarrassed of the weakness of her own will. If she were like the Vampire Princess, she would surely have been told everything by Lufas, even if she was under the same circumstances.

That self-centered absurdly out-of-the-box girl who could forcefully throw off the yoke of the Goddess’s interference would never have to be afraid of being controlled by her or of having her memories read. But I couldn’t do that. I resisted, but in the end, I was taken over. If the same thing were to happen

again, it'd probably yield the same result.

It's just so pathetic. I hate it...

It wasn't a matter of stats. Even infinite stats wouldn't help you against the Goddess, after all. That ability was due to an incredible will that went beyond mere stats. If it wasn't for that, it would be impossible to resist the Goddess.

"So, what do I do now? Am I allowed to go back already?"

"No, stay here just in case. I think it'll be fine, but we might need your abilities if something goes wrong."

"That's fine with me, but what about the seal?"

"I've sent Borealis the Crown there to replace you already. It'll be fine."

Parthenos was quiet for a moment. "You think of everything, don't you?"

Borealis the Crown was a skilled level 1000 Grappler who'd served under Lufas. He had originally been the emperor of humanity's largest empire before Lufas had appeared, but after the invasion of the Dragon King Ladon, it seemed he'd lost a lot of his authority. After that, Lufas, who had just happened to have been passing by, defeated the Dragon King. Borealis had been entranced, so, when she founded her own country, he immediately bent the knee, or so the story went.

He was 220 centimeters tall, and he would have looked like a middle-aged gentleman if it weren't for the fact that the way he dressed—shirtless with a mantle—made him seem somewhat like a pervert. Also, when it came to approaching for a fistfight, he could even give Lufas a hard time. Put bluntly, he was leagues above Parthenos in terms of singular combat capability. Furthermore, he was accompanied by the knight captain Alphecca, who had been like one of his limbs in life, along with more of his elite forces.

"That's how it is. I'd like to have you help protect us here before regrouping with Miss Lufas."

"Hmm, fair enough. Looks like I'll be using my power for the missus's sake for the first time in a while."

"Yes, I'll be counting on you."

“Oh? One of the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars, I see.”

“Former, that is. I passed down that title to my grandchild. Now I’m just Parthenos.” Parthenos laughed boldly as she activated her skills.

She started with the high-level priest skill “Double Star.” The condition to acquire this skill was for the user to be priest level 100.

Then, she activated “Fourth Star.” The condition to acquire this one was for the user’s Priest level to be 200 and for the priest to have already learned Double Star. Also, this skill couldn’t be used unless Double Star had already been cast, so using it required a bit of lag. However, its effect was tremendous. The skill allowed the user to cast up to four mid-level heaven-arts at once for a certain amount of time.

Parthenos moved her fingers, and four pentagrams appeared in front of her. Each of those applied themselves to her allies around her. There was the Sun element heaven-art “Photon Weapon.” It buffed her allies’ attack power. Then, the Sun element heaven-art “Ray Block.” It raised her allies’ physical defense. Third, the Sun element heaven-art “Ray Barrier.” This one raised her allies’ magic defense. And lastly, the Sun element heaven-art “Photon Field,” which created a field which could shoulder any damage taken from allies.

“And that’s not all. If you don’t hurry and stop me, it’ll be too late, you know?” Parthenos said as she once again started casting.

Sol’s expression changed as he immediately went on the attack, but he was too late. Thanks to him showing off how easy he had it, he was a step behind. In that time, Parthenos had already cast another four buffs. The Sun element heaven-art “Regenerate,” which automatically regenerated ally HP for its duration. Then, she cast the Sun element heaven-art “Mana Regenerate.” This one did the same, but for SP. Third was the Sun element heaven-art “Speed of Light.” It doubled the speed of those it affected. And lastly the Sun element heaven-art “Aura Burst,” which raised all stats of those who it affected. It also stacked with other buffs.

Sol attempted to attack Parthenos, but Terra blocked it with his blade. Normally, Sol would completely overpower Terra, but this time, their contest of

strength was even. It was all thanks to Parthenos's buffs. Terra's block gave Parthenos another turn. Once more, she had enough time to cast even more spells.

"Hey, hey. I'm gonna keep going, you know? Maybe you should hurry up!"

She cast the Sun element heaven-art "Auto Resurrection." Anyone affected by this would automatically revive once when their HP hit 0. Parthenos also cast the Sun element heaven-art "Element Reflector," an art which halved damage from a selected element for its duration. Then she cast the Sun element heaven-art "Aura Feather," which gave her allies wings of light, allowing them to fly. Her fourth Sun element heaven-art was "Ray Force;" it buffed the magic damage her allies dealt to their enemies.

"No way... So fast!" While busy exchanging blows with Terra, Sol was shocked seeing how fast Parthenos was casting.

It was possible for high-level casters to be able to cast four spells or arts at once, but there was always some amount of time lag between starting to cast and activating the spell. For most casters, four at once would usually mean several minutes... Even one of the Seven Luminaries' levels would need a couple seconds. It was unreal to see someone doing so in pretty much an instant with no requisite actions.

Fourth Star was not an invincible skill. In fact, while it allowed the caster to cast more spells at once, it lengthened the casting time of each spell, making those spells lose their speed advantage. The problem with the skill was that it stopped spells from coming in a timely fashion when it was most important. It was common sense for priests to value instantaneousness over the benefits the skill gave them. *But this is strange. This girl... She's been mixing in high-tier arts as well!*

However, that was what made Parthenos special. The Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars all possessed unique skills, each of them boasting unfair strength with Leon being the only exception. So, Parthenos naturally was part of that as well. Her unique skill's name was Zavijava, and it was a little hard to say. The skill's effect was rather mundane compared to the skills possessed by the other Twelve Stars. At least, it wasn't the kind of skill that was easy to see and had a

lot of impact, but that didn't mean it was weak. In fact, it was so brutally strong that, in the game, Lufas had reacted with, "Isn't this just unfair?" when she'd seen it.

The effect of her skill was to invalidate all restrictions on high-ranking heaven-arts. There were several skills that restricted the user from being able to use arts over a certain level or tier, but Parthenos could ignore that and mix in as many highest-tier arts as she wanted.

At first glance, it seemed mundane, but it was almost a joke how absurd the skill was. That was because priests and sorcerers got skills that lowered the SP cost for spells under a certain rank or eliminated the casting time for heaven-arts under a certain rank. Of course, this only applied for low-ranking spells and heaven-arts, so the main use for Fourth Star was to machine-gun out low-tier heaven-arts at a high rate, thus substituting quality for quantity.

But Parthenos could ignore that. Skills that would normally only apply to weak arts and spells easily applied themselves to her highest abilities. As a result, she was able to fire off as many high-level arts as she wanted with no wait time, a nightmare for her enemies! True, in terms of actual combat ability, Parthenos was in the running for the weakest among the Twelve Stars. There was no doubt about that.

Actually, she wasn't just in the running; she was clearly the weakest. As an individual, Pollux was weaker. However, she was treated as a set with her "twin" Castor, so, given that, the Maiden was still weaker than the two of them. Even Lufas had said, "Her support abilities are amazing, but her combat abilities are a little..." She basically just said that Parthenos was weak. However, she had also said, "She's more than worth it just by having her standing in the back casting." Parthenos was a support specialist who could change the tides of battle just by being there; that was the power of the former Maiden.

Terra's blade grazed Sol as he broke through the front line, letting fly a punch at the most dangerous girl of the group. But he was careless. Parthenos was, in fact, the weakest of the Twelve Stars, but she wasn't like Pollux where her stats were so weak they didn't line up with her level. At the very least, she had the stats befitting of a level 800...and now that she was buffed so hard, her strength was enough to take at least one hit from a front-liner.

“You fool!”

Sol gasped, surprised.

Parthenos blocked Sol’s fist with her log as she smiled, her crafty old eyes narrowing in mirth. Just like that, Parthenos gave her opponent no time to recover from his astonishment before his right leg suddenly rotated on its axis. Her strike with the log, using the power of centrifugal force, laid Sol flat on the ground.

9

As its name implied, the Branch of the Ouroboros was the smallest branch of the Wood ouroboros’s tree that had been cut into a size that could barely fit in a human hand. It could be said to be just a tree branch. There had been nothing done to it to make it into a weapon; it was basically just the base material itself. However, it had once been part of the Wood ouroboros, so just by swinging it around, it demonstrated enough power to make legendary weapons cry in shame and lose their confidence.

Parthenos loved it and was one of the few people allowed to use it. *Processing this branch would be evil.* Parthenos believed that using it as it was would be the best way to bring out all the branch’s strengths.

However, it was still a part of the Wood ouroboros, even though some might have said it was just a branch. It was part of Mizgarz’s largest living thing, which legend said would be large enough to wrap around all of Mizgarz, if its underground roots were included. In actual numbers, the tree was absurdly large, over fifty thousand kilometers long when stretched out. When it came to the branches, even the thinnest parts at the very edges were longer and thicker than high-rise buildings on Earth.

Parthenos wielded just a cutting of the very tip, and this wood was also what the *Argo* was made of. Of course, the ouroboros wouldn’t feel anything just by having such a small piece scraped off of it. To humans, it would be like cutting off a small piece of the end of their hair.

“Take this!”

Parthenos swung the log that was larger than she was and sent Sol flying. As he flew, she followed up with another attack, aiming her palm at him and firing off a light spell. The sky lit up briefly, and Sol was swallowed in a string of explosions.

However, he was the avatar of an ouroboros. Not only that, but he was also neither split in his powers, like Pollux and Castor, nor half-asleep. While he didn't have any unfair skills like Pollux did, in exchange, all the points she had to put into her special ability had been spent on his combat power, so he possessed tremendous speed and power. He flew out of the smoke, seemingly unharmed from that exchange.

Terra's mantle waved in the air as he slashed at Sol. In the air, Sol met Terra's blade, his hand in the form of a knife-hand strike, and the clash between the two birthed a shower of sparks.

“Devil Slash!”

Terra's blade glowed blue as it unleashed a blade of concentrated mana. He had activated a Swordmaster skill, Devil Slash, which was one of the few ranged attack options available to the swordsman-type classes.

The attack took Sol's arm, spewing blood into the winds, but Sol never stopped smiling as he gathered strength in his arm. When he did, his arm regenerated instantly, and he punched at Terra like nothing had happened.

Sol sharply descended, chasing after the surprised Terra, who had been blown backwards. But Terra flipped in midair and landed properly on the ground, which allowed him to circle around behind Sol within a moment.

Sol also quickly reacted, turning around and meeting Terra's attack head-on. To Virgo, it looked like they had only exchanged one blow each, but there had actually been a fierce exchange of countless attacks and blocks going on. In terms of numbers, there were hundreds of exchanges between blade and fist. The sound could only follow after the attacks themselves, the snap-crack of which created a storm of wind centered around the two of them.

It was a fight between those who were strong, one that Virgo was a long way

from being able to intervene in. However, there were several others there who could. There was Castor of the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars, the recovered trio of knights, and Parthenos, who could participate on the front lines if she wanted to.

Castor jumped, his swing drawing a perfect arc as he attempted to force damage through Sol's guard. Sol was sent crashing into the ground, where Parthenos was waiting with her log to swing and send him flying again. From there, the trio of knights all attacked him with their swords, but Sol swiftly dodged them, disappearing in the process.

"I-I can't tell what's going on at all... Ah, Mr. Terra got cut... Huh? They're already over there?"

"You can see Terra? Wow. I only see shadows bouncing around at ridiculous speed."

Virgo was desperately trying to keep up with a battle she could only scarcely visually comprehend, but it was all she could do to barely keep up with the afterimages. Even so, it was already great that she was able to keep up with those because meanwhile, Pollux couldn't even do that.

That was one of the reasons why Pollux couldn't command her heroic spirits like Castor could. Her thoughts and vision simply couldn't keep up with the speed at which they fought. She couldn't even comprehend what was happening, so there was no way for her to give orders. That was the sad reality of being super-specialized in her unique gift.

That was when a series of loud sounds interrupted Pollux's self-deprecation. As the five of them focused their improvised teamwork around Terra's evenly pitched fight with Sol, the battle increased in intensity.

Terra activated the skill "Quick Raid," turning into a blue burst of wind along with his blade and resolutely attacking. However, Sol was not one to fall behind. He dodged every single one of Terra's attacks that fell like rain at the speed of lightning before turning around and unleashing a tornado of blows himself.

Sol thought he'd hit and punched through Terra, but that misconception only lasted a moment. The next instant, Terra became a phantom and disappeared just before Sol suffered a slash to his shoulder.

This was another Swordmaster skill, one which left behind afterimages for a time while conducting an attack, “Phantom Sword.” If Lufas were around, she would’ve described it harshly by saying, “It’s effective against people, but against the CPU, it’s a dead skill because they don’t get fooled at all. Who would even use this skill? Widen its hitbox at the very least, devs.”

“Storm Harpoon!”

Castor swung his anchor, creating a blade of wind. His attack hit Sol’s head, but all it did in terms of damage was cause some light bleeding. It also caused his stance to crumble, however, allowing the trio of knights to attack all at once, kicking off a fierce series of exchanges.

In front of their perfectly synced sword strikes, Sol did not falter. Swords versus bare hands. Three versus one. Normally, the victor would be apparent, but this time, the battle was even. Sol wasn’t being given an opening to make a fatal attack. No, they weren’t even. Little by little, the knights were being pushed back.

Parthenos’s buffs were working. They should have put Sol completely on the back foot rather than just on even ground. However, now the gap was once again widening. The reason was that... Well, Sol could actually also use heaven-arts.

Oh no! That sly one. He’s been buffing himself! So he’s the same type as Miss Lufas!

Sol laughed as if in response to Parthenos’s inner unease and impatience. *Yes! If your opponent uses heaven-arts to get stronger, why not use them yourself?!*

While he couldn’t cast as fast as Parthenos could, it was still possible for him to buff himself one art at a time while fighting. Each time an art was activated, the gap would grow, eventually returning the state of the battle to the same gap as before. If that happened, Pollux, Parthenos, and the others would be at an overwhelming disadvantage. The best answer for this situation would probably be to nullify his heaven-arts.

However, the element that was best at doing that was the Moon element. The Sun element was rife with many buffing spells, but in exchange, it had almost no dispel effects. Pollux wanted to call a spirit that could handle

dispelling, but if she were to undo her skill sealing right now, the Goddess would probably see that as the perfect chance to possess her.

Taurus's skill Aldebaran and Lufas's weapon Lifthrasir would also work, but neither of them were present. However, that was when help came from an unexpected place.

"Luna Dispel!"

The black light of a Moon element spell flew through the sky, taking away one of the heaven-arts buffing Sol. The spell had come from Luna, whose fingers were pointed at the sky.

Dispel effects did not take the caster and target's power into account. As long as the spell landed, it would do its job. There was no way Sol would have seen Luna as a threat; he had probably even forgotten she existed. However, having basically been ambushed by Luna's spell, Sol had one of his buffs taken away. But that was it. All of Luna's spells after that first one were easily dodged by Sol, who seemed to teleport in front of her.

Without even a word, he swung his hand down in a knife-hand strike, but Parthenos butted in from the side, defending Luna from the blow. However, Sol's aim had always been Parthenos. Taking advantage of the momentary opening, thanks to his target coming into his range of her own will, he changed the aim of his attack.

Taken by surprise, Parthenos gasped, finding herself unable to react in time.

Parthenos's log and Sol's hand passed by each other, and an arm flew into the air. At the same time, the log buried itself in Sol's face, sending him flying as far as Parthenos's strength allowed.

However, Parthenos lost her balance and fell to her knee right afterwards. She was missing her right arm from the shoulder. The severed stump leaked particles that emitted a faint light before disappearing. Seeing that, Virgo's face paled.

"Granny!"

"Don't shout. This body is just an illusion... I'm already dead, remember? It doesn't matter if I lose an arm from a borrowed body like this."

Parthenos acted strong, but on the inside, she was busy calmly calculating how disadvantageous this was. *If we keep fighting like this we'll be the ones against a wall. There's a huge difference in the speed of our support spells, but we'll eventually be surpassed the longer this fight goes on; we'll be overrun.*

We'd have a chance if Luna's dispels would hit, but that's probably impossible to ask for, given the difference in levels. She'll probably never hit again. Also, the loss of my arm is a pretty big blow, even though it was the fault of my own carelessness. Arms were basically openings for a practitioner to launch spells or heaven-arts from. Losing an arm was like a gunner losing a barrel of a gun.

Meanwhile, Pollux looked up to the sky, seeming to have resolved her will. She probably planned to take a gamble... She'd have Castor take off her ring and attempt to push through with weight of numbers. True, if it went well, Sol would be no match, but if she was possessed by the Goddess again, it would be game over.

After a moment of silent resignation, Parthenos thought, *Looks like this is it...*

The gap between level 800 and level 1000 was insurmountably large. Even in death, Parthenos was a member of the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars, someone captured by Lufas. Even after joining the argonautai, that restriction remained, and she was stuck at level 800.

This didn't just apply to her. Fenix and Hydras were also under the same circumstances, so what was necessary was a back line who hadn't been turned under Lufas's sway—the level 1000 next generation of the Maiden. It was time for Parthenos to do what she would normally have done before dying; it was time to pass the baton down to the next generation.

“Virgo. Come to me.”

If I do this, I'll probably lose the power to fight myself. Even if I'm still called an argonautai, I won't be able to do anything anymore.

This even happened to Aeneas. There was no reason for it not to. However, Parthenos was not worried. Unlike herself, her grandchild had talent from birth, and she was nothing like the girl who had known nothing of the world until meeting Lufas.

I've gone around the world and should have gained some perspective. So yes, let's pass it on to my beloved granddaughter, even if she isn't related by blood, along with my title as one of the Twelve Stars in full.

There was only ever one with the power of the guardian of the sanctuary. When it is time to pass on the torch, the levels and skills go with the title, though it was probably more accurate to say that passing over the role of guardian of the sanctuary also passed over all the skills and other things contained within. All that would be left after the transfer would be the skills and levels Parthenos had obtained herself beforehand.

This was a sort of safety in order to prevent inflation of too many overly strong people, but in essence, that just meant that every single guardian wasn't much without their guardian powers. The role and title of guardian of the sanctuary were what was strong, not Aeneas or Parthenos in particular. It was almost like just another piece of equipment. The role itself held power, so by handing it over, Parthenos was taking herself out of the fight.

But this is fine, she thought. I don't need this role given to me by the Goddess anymore, and I'm sure this will be the last inheritance ceremony in history. If the master is going to tear apart the Goddess's script, then there doesn't need to be a guardian of the sanctuary anymore.

Parthenos gathered all the power she could muster in her fingertip and poured it into Virgo. The power flew at Virgo's chest while she had yet to understand what was happening. The light the power gave off seemed to be sucked into her chest before she started to glow.



“Huh? Wha— Eh? What is this, Gran?!”

“I entrusted you with my power as the guardian, which I’d been holding on to up until now. Don’t be so surprised.”

“Huuuuhhh?!”

There, it’s done. I just pushed it onto her, so there was nothing like a ceremony or consent, but needs must. There wasn’t even time to explain things.

Normally, the succession of power would come with an explanation of how to use it, the successor’s duties, and so on and so forth, but half of that was out the window, since Parthenos had abandoned her duty and joined Lufas anyway. At this point, she thought nothing of her duty as the guardian, and she had no desire to burden her grandchild with that. The only purpose in passing on her power was to give her the ability to resist the unreasonable. In order to allow her to carve out her own future, Parthenos gave without hesitation. She even gave Virgo the skills and experience she’d obtained afterward. How to use it was entirely up to Virgo.

“I’ve given you all my power. Do with it what you will.”

“What I...will...?”

“Exactly. All of my battle experience, power, skills, magic, and heaven-arts are with you. I’ll even give you this log!”

“Umm...” Virgo hesitated. “Sorry. I don’t need that.”

Parthenos said nothing in reply, still ready to hand over the log.

“It looks heavy and hard to carry around. Plus, I have this sword that Miss Lufas gave me... And there’s no way a regular log like that can be a weapon, I think...”

Parthenos had resolved to give everything to her grandchild, but it seemed that there was no way she would take the log.

It's a strange feeling. I don't actually feel any drastic changes within me. I'm not excited. In fact, it almost feels like nothing's changed. But... I can see now. I can see how Terra moves, even though it was so hard just to guess what was happening in the fight before. Castor too.

Virgo could clearly see the three knights getting beaten back, as well as how they tried to regain their footing. As she was now, she could fully recognize how Sol had broken through the front lines and was trying to finish off Parthenos.

"I won't let you!"

Flapping her wings, Virgo got in between them, catching Sol's fist with La Pucelle. *I won't be able to take it; I'll be blasted away*, she thought. However, while Virgo felt a strong force, it was nowhere near as much as she'd expected, and even though she was pushed back a little, Virgo had actually succeeded in stopping Sol's fist.

"What...?"

Sol was clearly shocked, and for a moment, he let up because of this surprising event. In that moment, Terra came in from the side and took off one of Sol's arms at the elbow. However, Sol immediately regenerated it and returned fire at Terra. The return blow was stopped by a wall of light as well, bouncing Sol's fist back. Of course, Sol was surprised at that, but Terra was agape as well.

It was difficult to find any shield in the world that could completely stop Sol's attack, even if the user was level 1000 and they managed to catch Sol by surprise. At the very least, it was completely impossible for a normal level 1000. The only ones capable of such a feat would be a level 1000 on par with Lufas, Megrez, and Merak—one who was barely even a level 1000 anymore. In other words, just being level 1000 was insufficient. The person needed to be even stronger than that, and there was no way Virgo, who had just obtained her power, was at that level. Parthenos had never been that strong in the first place, and she was the one who gave Virgo her power. So how did that happen?

"Yaaaaaaaahhhhh!"

"This... What the?!"

It was a leap—there was no other way to describe it. As if she was finally showing her true potential that had been restrained until now, Virgo’s sword chased down Sol. Even then, Sol was more skilled, and this was even more pronounced in close quarters combat. Virgo had definitely become stronger, but she hadn’t grown more experienced. Even though Virgo’s level now surpassed her predecessor Parthenos’s, there was a huge difference in experience. There was no way she could replicate Parthenos’s unfair machine-gun-like casting speed nor could she instantly choose the best art or spell for the situation like Parthenos could.

But Terra was also here, along with Castor and the three knights. There was Virgo’s inheritance, which had come with a strange sort of awakening for her, as well as the fact that Sol was outnumbered. Even an avatar like Sol wouldn’t find this easy to deal with, but still, he simply smiled daringly. *This is it... This is the fight I wanted! Something with some challenge! This is exactly what I was waiting for!*

With all that, the battle was finally even. It had taken so much just to finally get it that way. That just went to show how powerful Sol was; he was starting to resemble Lufas.

That realization made Terra’s expression grim, but Sol was laughing joyfully. Sol’s knife-hand clashed with Terra’s blade, sending sparks flying as the two disappeared at the same time.

Up! As soon as Luna had realized what happened and looked up, Terra and Sol had already clashed and immediately disappeared. The second she thought they were to the right, they were already to the left. The aftereffects of the fight broke trees, and by the time Luna registered that Terra had been sent into the ground, throwing up a cloud of dust, Sol had been slammed into a rock. In this fight, it was all Luna could do to chase afterimages, but at this point Virgo was barely able to keep up, and of course, so were Castor and the three knights.

“Devil Rend!”

Terra used the higher-tier version of Devil Slash, sending a blue slash at Sol. If it was to hit, the attack would bisect even mountains, but Sol met it with his bare fist.

“Hah!”

He’d used the Grappler skill Smash, a simple skill that just made it so if the attack it applied to hit, it would always be a critical hit.

The slash tore the skin of Sol’s fist, but before it got farther than that, the force from Sol’s punch erased the slash as they canceled each other out. However, that was the moment Terra switched to two-handing his blade as he unleashed a full-force vertical slash upon the avatar.

Terra had used a swordmaster skill named “Meteor Smash,” which boasted the most power out of all the once-a-day skills available to the swordmaster class. The slash, which came out with enough force to threaten to destroy the ground like a falling meteor, also came with an appropriate sense of intimidation.

At the same time, Sol clenched his fist and raised it up as if to pierce the heavens. He was also using a once-a-day limited-use skill, the name of which was Buster Impact. Just as the name implied, it was the Grappler version of Meteor Smash.

These high-impact skills lost their appeal at high levels where max damage became common. In fact, the meta at high levels was to prize multi-hit or combo skills, even if they lost a little power over simple high-firepower skills. However, skills like these were still useful for fresh level 100s so that even they would be able to push out five-digit damage. Their destructive power was immeasurable.

An explosion resounded as a shock wave rocked the continent with Alfheim as its epicenter. The shock wave caused old buildings in nearby towns and villages to collapse, creating a disastrous scene as even those in faraway lands almost fell over from the resultant winds. In the midst of that, the two combatants were sent flying in separate directions. Sol crashed into the ground but quickly bounced up, rolled, and stuck his landing. Terra managed to arrest his momentum by stabbing his sword into the ground, carving a straight line describing his travel.

“Well done, child of the Moon dragon. I never expected to enjoy myself this much. As I thought, is the reason you’re able to exhibit such power because of

your anger at my deceit?”

“No. I was deceived because of my own immaturity. I may feel ashamed of my own incompetence, but I would never hold a grudge against you for it.”

With some space between them, they reverted to a glaring contest. Sol continued the conversation as he calmed his breathing while Terra dutifully replied. However, neither side let down their guard as they spoke. There were no openings to take advantage of.

“I fight for the people I must protect. My sword exists to ensure their unchanging future,” said Terra.

“I see. A knight’s stereotypical response. But have you forgotten what the true form of the people you’re trying to protect is? It’s all just an illusion... They’re nothing but the Goddess’s spell, puppets in the shape of people. Is there any worth in a future for them? Wouldn’t simply fulfilling their role and disappearing be better for the world?” Sol asked, attempting to shake Terra up in a ridiculing manner by questioning the justness of his reason to fight.

However, Terra was not affected. His blade would not be dulled by something like that. “It is as you say. But just like humans, we can laugh and cry too. We can share in joy and love others. Even if we are simply a fabrication of magic, in no world should it be fine to simply erase us one-sidedly.”

“But to humans, you are simply invaders. Have you forgotten all the sins you have piled up in the past?”

“I haven’t. I probably never will. I have killed many in order to protect my people. Yes, I am probably a murderer and a sinner to humans. But are the devilfolk, the *people* who have never set foot on the battlefield also to blame? Are those who dirtied their hands because they needed to do so to live evil? All of you were the ones who wanted this. Should we, who have had no other choice, also be judged for it?”

While he was talking, Terra thought back to all those he’d killed. His past, in which he’d taken the lives of many brave souls who’d challenged him, would never disappear. No matter how a person may interpret it, he had deemed humanity as his enemy and had killed them in an effort to protect his people. He couldn’t simply make excuses like, “It was war.” There was no doubt in

Terra's mind that he was guilty. He had gone to the battlefield out of his own will and killed the same way.

If they call me a sinner, I'll accept it. If... If we do manage to find a way to rebirth the devilfolk and we become able to experience joy along with humanity... If such a future comes... If humans want to try me for my crimes... At that time, I will gladly head to the gallows as the last of the accursed devilfolk. I've been ready for this ever since I took up my sword. Ever since I killed my first person in battle, I've known that I would someday die miserably, and that's exactly why I will give it my all to carve a path to the future. Even if I'm not in it, as long as she is, I'm happy.

"So I will take this sword and use it to cut down our cursed fate. We will be the last devilfolk to walk down this evil path, so that we can live together instead of killing each other. For the future of my people... I will fight!"

There was no hesitation in Terra's swordsmanship and no doubt in his eyes. The light of the sun that came down from the heavens reflected off of his armor, and as his mantle flapped in the wind, his form was the picture of a noble swordsman.

It was a complicated feeling for the Twelve Stars present, who, until just a little while ago, were the enemies of the devilfolk. Well, they were still enemies, to be fair, but they couldn't simply take Terra's words as convenient, sweet words from an invader that meant nothing. After all, his sentiments were the exact same as those of their master, Lufas. She'd also resolved to kill each and every one of her enemies in her pursuit of peace. She'd erased them mercilessly. By killing all the enemies, peace would eventually come. Lufas had run down that thorny path barefoot, heedless of both her own blood and the blood of her enemies dyeing her pure red.

Ah, how ironic. To open the lid only to discover that two people of like minds have been killing each other for the same goal: peace. I suppose I should be happy about that, but this really is a complex feeling.

Pollux paused as she watched the scene before her, eventually asking, "Hey, brother, is that man the next hero?"

"No, the hero is another person. The current hero is some boy from a country

called Japan named Sei.”

“You mean that unreliable-looking child with the tiger, cat, and gorilla beastfolk?”

“Indeed. It’s the unreliable-looking boy with the cat, tiger, and gorilla beastfolk.”

Pollux was filled with silent disbelief. “*He’s the hero?*”

“Apparently.”

What is...

With that half-formed thought, the fairy siblings melancholically watched the fierce fight between Sol and Terra grow in intensity. Things seemed even so far, but that was only because of their advantage of numbers. This equilibrium could fall at any second, but Sol seemed to be enjoying this hard battle, his expression dyed with the utmost joy at such a challenging fight.

However, it seemed that whatever was lurking behind Sol wasn’t enjoying how close this battle was nearly as much as he. “She” wanted to make victory as guaranteed as possible, so she’d decided to send in help—and a third party boorishly intervened.

“This... No!”

Sol’s body shined with divine light, and the feeling of pressure he gave off increased. There was no doubt; the Goddess had made her move. Feeling that, Castor shouted at the same time as Sol.

Crap, this is bad. Castor had simply felt a sense of dread and danger as Sol’s power increased, but Sol had that feeling first.

You shouldn’t have done this!

“Oh, Goddess, stop this! This is...”

“It’s too late. Looks like you made her worry.”

While Sol panicked, Pollux simply spoke quietly. Then, Parthenos removed the ring on her finger that was sealing her power. *Let the Goddess give him power. That just means her attention is elsewhere.* That was basically saying outright

that there was no danger of Pollux getting possessed again, the very thing she was afraid of... It was a foolish move.

“Come around me, my beloved children... Come, argonautai!”

A pillar of light rose out of Pollux’s body and pierced through the sky. The heavens split, and light shined down. From the gap in the clouds, heroic spirits descended to the earth one after the other. Answering the Fairy Princess’s call, each and every one of them readied their weapons. With that, the battle was decided. With both fairy siblings together and an army of heroic spirits all summoned at once, there were very few things in all of Mizgarz that could win against such a thing.

Sol clicked his tongue, realizing he was being forced to accept that his fun time was over. Even if he stayed, he would just die.

“I guess this is it. Even I wouldn’t be able to win with all these ancient heroes here.” Sol paused, considering his options. “Well, whatever. I can just go finish off the current heroes. Not to mention, I already achieved my goal here.” With those ominous words, Sol swiftly turned around and left.

Castor reacted quickly, ordering several heroic spirits to give chase, but running him down would be hard given how Sol was giving his all to running away. Pollux was deeply impressed, seeing Sol running away so skillfully, and she upwardly adjusted her impression of him. *He’s not just strong. He has good decision-making skills too. He’s going to be quite the enemy.*

“As soon as he realizes he can’t win, he makes a quick escape before you can prevent it, huh?” Pollux paused for a second. “He’s good.”

“Indeed. Those who can tell when it’s time to leave are the hardest to deal with. We’ve made a troublesome enemy,” Parthenos commented, praising Sol’s skillfulness.

The victory just now was purely due to the Goddess jumping the gun. If she hadn’t, they would definitely have had casualties, whether they won or lost.

But his last line before he left... Was that a bluff? The ouroboros still shows no signs of moving. It’s still sleeping. Also, did he mean the Seven Heroes? That part was probably a trap too. There’s a high chance that he’s aiming for an opening

we'll make when we try to protect the Seven Heroes.

However, Pollux hadn't noticed that deep down in the depths of the earth, the Ouroboros of Wood opened its eyes once before quickly closing them again.

* *

The ocean—it is the mother of all life and a world of its own, filled with mysteries. In its depths there existed those who had built a civilization alien to humanity: the merfolk. They could also be called fish people, and they were children of the sea who possessed high intelligence and combat ability. The women had human upper halves and fish lower halves. Meanwhile, the men were the complete opposite, and in this world, they were classified as demihumans.

Also, the fish people were largely split into two groups: those who would venture to the surface, wanting to be treated as people, and those who had completely shunned the surface and thus made the ocean their own paradise. The former had pledged allegiance to Leon, while the latter lived in the ocean kingdom of Skíðblaðnir.

Beautiful mermaids swam through clear waters, guarded by males armed with harpoons. Most of the buildings in this civilization were towers. The places that would seem to be windows to an outsider were all open, allowing the merfolk to swim in and out. The buildings were shaped like towers, but there were no stairs of any sort. There were simply holes connecting different floors, which was enough for the merfolk who could move freely in three dimensions. This construction was based on such movement, which was impossible on the surface.

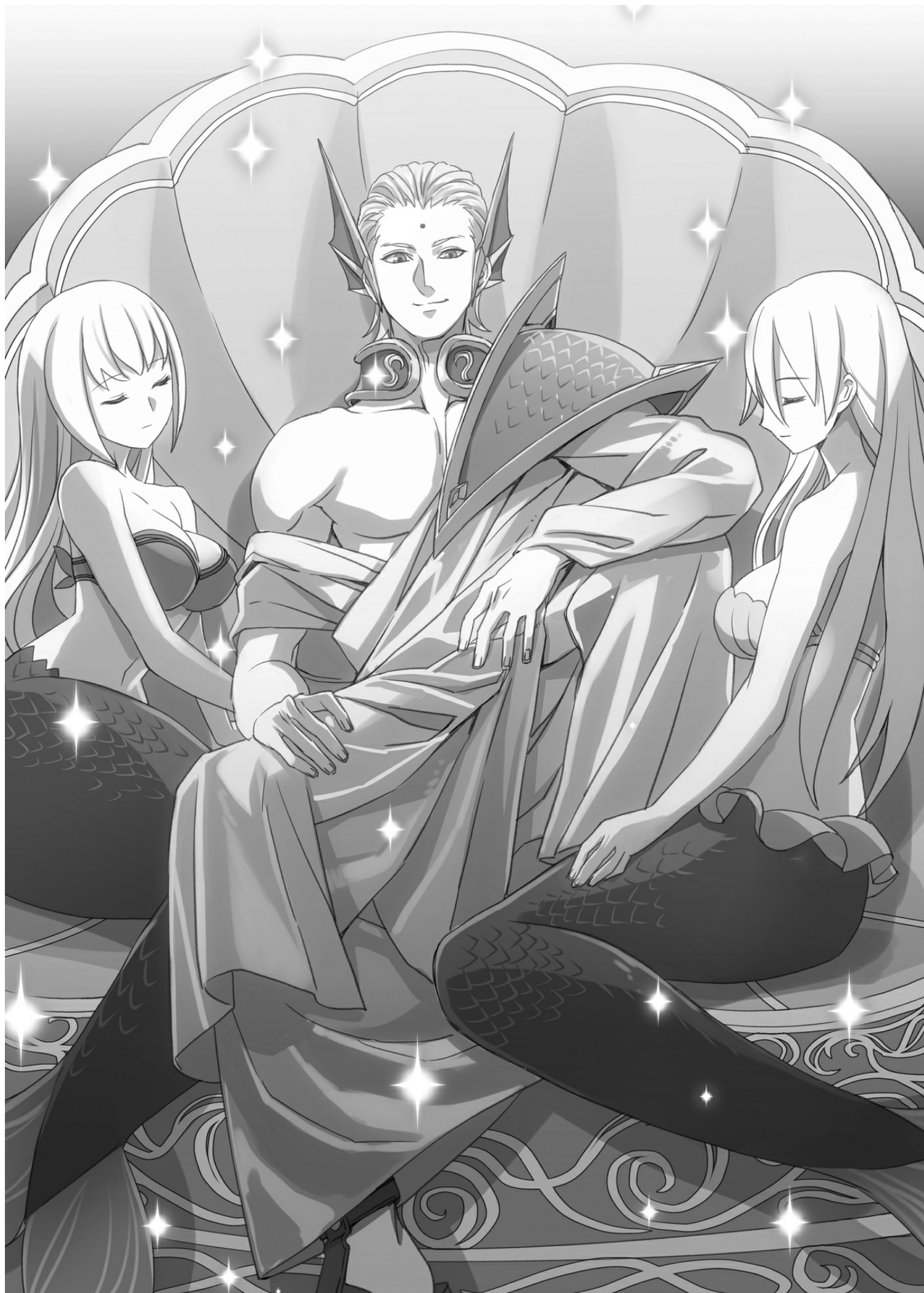
In lieu of vehicles or other such transportation, the merfolk used monsters transformed from orcas named orvahls. Even the babies were ten meters long, and the large monsters went up to thirty meters long at the biggest. They were also possessed of high intelligence and were strong in combat, but even then, they were tamed easily, bonding well with people.

There was also one other animal that was closely entwined with their lives, small ones named dohfins. These were originally dolphins who were domesticated, and after many years living with the merfolk, they became

smaller and were now completely treated as pets. The merfolk also selectively bred them, resulting in dohphins of many different colors. However, this also resulted in a problem of stray dohphins in the street after their owners had gotten tired of raising them and had thrown them away.

There was a single building a size larger than the rest in this underwater capital. It was a large palace made of pure gold and crystal, and it screamed to the world that the king of all the merfolk of this country lived there. The only ones employed within the palace were the most beautiful of mermaids. There was not a single male in sight. Also, the mermaids working there were all blondes or redheads, and they all had long hair.

In the farthest reaches of the palace, in a room that was extremely gaudy, shiny, and adorned with an almost unbelievable amount of crystal, was this palace's only man. He was sitting on a throne that looked like a large seashell, being waited on by beautiful mermaids. Strangely enough for a country of merfolk, he alone seemed fully human. There were no fish parts on him, and he only wore frilly, fin-like clothing that swayed in the water currents. His blond hair was slicked back, and his sharp eyes fully showed his arrogant attitude. There was a beauty mark in the center of his forehead, and his face was well into the category of elegantly beautiful. By outward appearance, he looked to be in his early twenties. He was thin, but his clothing showed how trained his body was as the women serviced him.



This man was the king of the ocean. He controlled the waters, and in a sense, he was the one in control of most of Mizgarz.

At the moment, a young mermaid who seemed to be a messenger had her head bowed in his presence. “My liege, I have a report. The descendants of those who went to the surface disappeared the other day.”

“Ah, those fools who followed Leon, huh? Such idiocy... They should have just subjected themselves to my rule and protection. I cannot understand why they would care to be treated as equals by those who are simply satisfied with the narrow world of the surface. As if the opinions of those inferior species matter.”

The king let out scornful laughter, not even trying to hide his disdain. To him, the seven races were nothing but inferior species not worth his time. In fact, he didn’t even consider them as people. To him, all living things in this world were inferior; they were nothing but knockoffs of gods.

There are only two people in this world of worth. One is, of course, me, the pinnacle of beauty and perfection and a child of god. The other is my beloved, who, though of inferior birth, has surpassed the framework of her roots and become a unique race all to herself. A rank under us would be the ouroboroses and the Fairy Princess and the like, and I suppose the Devil King barely makes it as well.

The man looked the messenger girl up and down, his overtly lustful gaze basically licking her all over limb to limb.

“Is there anything else?”

“Y-Yes. There are some visitors to the palace who claim to have business with you, my liege.”

“Business? With me? Who are these disrespectful louts?”

“I-I don’t know. I have never seen them before. There is a female golem and someone who seems to be an old human wearing a monocle...”

Pisces paused, repeating the words to himself under his breath. “A female golem and an old man with a monocle...?”

After hearing the girl’s report, two people he didn’t especially like

immediately sprung to his mind. There was the killer maid golem who wasn't offensive to the eye but, in the end, was still artificially beautiful, and the crazed goat demon. He couldn't stop himself from remembering them. His impression of them wasn't too good because no matter how many times he'd tried to correct them, they had never stopped calling him by that awful name.

"I see. By the way, I don't believe I've seen you before?"

"I was taken on as an apprentice just the other day. My name is Suirat Tigas. Your usual messenger has taken ill, so I have been chosen as a stand-in."

"I see..."

It wasn't exactly uncommon for there to be a new hire he didn't know of. It wasn't nice to hear, but to the king, they were just underlings, and apprentice ones at that, so reporting each and every one of them to him would actually be the disrespectful thing to do. If they had to be introduced to the king, it would only be after their training was done.

Well, to be fair, there was a separate facility for training, and normally, those in training wouldn't be allowed to work in the palace until they had finished, but the King decided not to investigate that. *Hmm... She looks a little young, but her hair color is the same.* The girl was blonde, but her hair turned scarlet at the tips. It was the same unique feature of the one woman he recognized as an equal, the one he was in love with. In fact, all the women who worked in the palace resembled her in some way or another. It was simple. Basically, this man was making a harem of women who resembled the one he had a one-sided crush on. To him, having one with the exact same hair color was not something he could let go.

"For now, just chase those fools away. Also, you said your name was Suirat? I have decided. Tonight, you will be my partner. Be honored."

Having unexpectedly found someone to attend to him through the night, the king's face twisted lecherously as the girl turned red in the face and looked down.

What an innocent reaction. I've been having nothing but experienced girls recently, so having one like this every once in a while will be fun. Such were the vulgar thoughts of the king, but those thoughts were blasted away in the next

moment.

The entrance crumpled and was blown inwards, directly hitting the king.

“Forgive us for entering so dynamically. Is the pervert narcissist Eros home?” said the steel maid golem.

“Playing the big dog in a palace full of women, huh? What bad taste, as always,” the intelligent-looking but actually extremely radical old gentlemen said as they entered.

Their entrance, which was far too cruel with no hint of respect anywhere, had the surrounding mermaids in shock. That was only natural. After all, he was their king, and it was unheard of for anyone to slam a door into him.

“My name isn’t Eros! It’s Pisces, you idiots!” the king, or rather, one of the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars, Pisces the Fish, yelled at the two of them. He made no effort to hide his irritation at being called his real name as he flung the door off himself and stood up.

11

Rewinding time back a little, Lufas and the rest toured around the world in the *Argo* trying to find Pisces while Pollux, Terra, and the others were fighting.

“It was faint, but just now, I have detected a trace of Eros’s mana. It seems as if he is below us,” said Libra.

They had been flying around in the *Argo* for a while before Libra had spoken up, and they stopped. Having been told that he was under them, Lufas looked over the side of the boat and found only a vast expanse of ocean. Thinking that he might be on one of the solitary islands dotting the scenery, she concentrated and tried to see farther, but there were no signs of people on any of the islands.

In normal times, Lufas’s eyesight could capture the silhouette of a bug smaller than one centimeter over twenty meters away. However, by using mana, she could create a lens in front of her eyes and see even farther away. Lufas created two different lenses with mana. One was an objective lens, and the other was

an optical lens; she also surrounded the lenses with mana so as not to let light escape. Like that, she'd formed what was essentially an improvised refracting telescope in order to see far-off islands. As a spell, it was named "Light Scope," and it was a support spell, which was rare for magic.

In the game, it simply allowed the player to zoom in. That was it. *I remember that sometimes you could do this too close to another character and end up zooming in through their model to see through to the other side. Fix that shit, devs.*

However, even with all that, Lufas still saw nothing.

"So he's in the ocean."

"Yes, most likely."

There wasn't anything unusual about that. Just as Pisces's title implied, he made the water his battlefield, unlike the others in the Twelve Stars who mainly specialized in land combat. Therefore, it was easy to predict that he would be in the ocean, but that didn't stop this fact from being unpleasant.

The ocean was vast, much more than any landmass, not to mention the added dimension of depth, which meant there was much more area to search than on land as well. Not only that, but no one in the group was specialized in underwater movement. Of course, that included Libra, Sagittarius, and Aigokeros, who were the Pisces search team. So before going into the water, there would be a need to plan a method to do so.

"How long can each of you hold your breath underwater?" Lufas asked.

"I do not need to breathe, so I can stay under however long I need," answered Libra.

"I haven't really tried," Aigokeros admitted, "but I believe I can hold on for a couple hours."

"My best is forty-five minutes," Sagittarius said.

Obviously, the difference between the living and non-living showed itself. Libra, who wasn't technically alive, had no need to breathe. However, she was very heavy, unlike what her appearance suggested, weighing in at three

hundred kilograms. If she were to simply drop into the ocean as is, she would undoubtedly sink to the bottom. Even Lufas wasn't sure what was up with Aigokeros, but he was at least half alive. He existed somewhere between a normal living thing and a devilfolk, so he hadn't completely lost all function as a living being. Then, there was Sagittarius, who as a centaur and normal living thing could only hold his breath for under an hour. Forty-five minutes was already incredible, though, but that was more a personal achievement rather than a mark of his race. It was just like seeing people who could hold their breath for over ten minutes.

“Then we'll need to figure something out. Sagittarius?”

“Leave it to me. Oxygen Suction.”

The heaven-art that Sagittarius had just used, “Oxygen Suction,” was a simple one that just gathered oxygen. It was something to help raise a living thing's oxygen intake capabilities, and it allowed the user to take in the oxygen that was diffused in the water as if they were breathing on land. In other words, its purpose was to allow the user to breathe underwater.

As an aside, in the game, if the player didn't use a skill like this when setting foot in an underwater field, they would steadily lose HP as a field effect. However, Lufas would simply ignore that and charge in, relying on an HP-regen heaven-art to brute-force her way through and out-heal the field damage effect. Overwhelming amounts of HP eliminated the need for oxygen. Lufas herself was getting farther and farther from a normal living being. Of course, she had no intention of doing the same thing in this world.

“Next is Libra. You should be fine as long as We prepare equipment for moving around in the water,” said Lufas before retreating to the ship's cabins in order to start her work.

Then, after a while, sounds started to drift out, including those of metal hitting metal, something snapping, and some explosions. The noises in no way suggested that something was being made, but unfortunately, there was no one around that would mind that. If Sei had been here, he might have made a retort, but he wasn't, and there was no one here to fill his role.

After a few more minutes of noises, Lufas came out holding something that

looked like a blue set of wings. It closely resembled Libra's support golem, Astraia. Upon closer inspection, an observer could tell that the thing had four pairs of wings and was made so that there would be two cannons sprouting from the hip when worn. However, the shoulder cannons that were normally seen on Astraia were nowhere to be seen.

"It's done. The aquatic movement combination golem. Let's name it...Astraia Type M. There is a propellant screw hidden behind the wings, and you can change direction by moving your wings. Your hip cannons shoot anchors, and you can transmit vibrations and ultrasonic waves through them as an attack to destroy the target from the inside. With this, you should be able to maneuver in the water without sinking," Lufas explained as she docked the Astraia Type M onto Libra.

Libra immediately started testing the equipment's functions, firing the anchors from her hip cannons. The launched anchors had wires attached, which seemed to stretch on into infinity. Eventually, the anchor dropped into the ocean, stabbing into a shark monster that just happened to be there. The monster was called a deep blue, and it liked the taste of human flesh. When Libra transmitted ultrasonic waves into the monster, the deep blue started bleeding from its eyes and mouth, gushing blood before it stopped moving. With it dead, Libra reeled in the anchor with the shark still on it, carrying the carcass onto the *Argo*.

"What a wonderful piece of equipment. With this, I will surely eliminate Eros," said Libra.

"No, don't eliminate him. Just bring him back here."

While talking, Lufas continued to reequip Libra for underwater operations. Because the machine gun Libra liked to use would be basically useless in the water, it was left in the *Argo*. In exchange, she would be using an underwater-use assault rifle made by Lufas, and with that, her preparations were complete.

"And this is for you, Aigokeros."

Having finished with Libra's equipment, Lufas used Exgate to pull out a weapon from a crack in space. However, the size of it was strange. A giant scythe—a death scythe—had appeared out of the deck of the ship like it had

grown from it. It was clearly not sized for human hands, probably because Lufas had expected it to be used while Aigokeros was already in monster form. Even just the handle was over one hundred meters long. The blade glinted ominously, and it looked capable of reaping an entire city in one strike, given its size.

“As you can see, this is made for you while you’re in your monstrous form. It is a weapon just for you, who can store it in your shadow while it’s not in use.”

Aigokeros was capable of diving into shadows. That ability wasn’t limited to just himself either; it also applied to the clothes he wore, among other things. This was something Aries and the others could not imitate. If Lufas were to grant them weapons for use while in their monstrous forms, there would be nowhere to put them. Aigokeros was the only one capable of this. That was why he was the only one with a weapon based on his gigantic form, and such size also meant corresponding strength. The weapon gave a massive +2000 STR adjustment while also having an instant-death effect. Of course, boss-class enemies almost all invalidated instant-death effects, but it would be perfect for easily mowing through weak opponents.

“I accept this with great joy. With this, I will be sure to bring nothing but death to Eros,” said Aigokeros.

“I’m telling you, guys, don’t kill him. Bring him back.”

Aigokeros took the weapon and shut it in his shadow. Also, though the sight of her casually handing an over one-hundred-meter-large scythe was incredibly surreal as always, there was no one to comment on it. Something like this only seemed normal to them.

Sagittarius seemed to be looking at Lufas with expectant eyes as well, but she had nothing to hand over to him.

“You already have a weapon, do you not? We have nothing for you.”

She was right, Sagittarius already had a weapon given to him by Lufas. So he would not be getting any support here. After hearing that, Sagittarius sat down, totally silent, and hugged his knees, but the only emotion anyone would feel seeing a half-naked man sulk would be annoyance, so Benetnasch just kicked him off the ship. He seemed so normal and proper when he’d first appeared

too. How sad.

“All right then, we will be off.”

“Please await our success.”

Following that, Libra and Aigokeros jumped off the ship, raising large spouts of water as they dove in. The atmosphere was relaxed, as if they were at a pool or something, but the *Argo* was currently ten thousand meters high, so they would have been falling at over two hundred kilometers per hour by the end. Diving into the water at that speed was akin to diving onto concrete, but there was no damage to Libra and the others. If they were weak enough to take damage from something like that, they wouldn't be the strongest golem and demon lord who had threatened to upset the balance of power in Mizgarz.

“Sagittarius isn't here,” Libra remarked casually once they were in the water.

It was impossible for people to speak while underwater. However, she was a golem. She was able to simply emit sound without the need for air. If it were to be described using knowledge only available to Lufas and Sei, it was like hearing sound from a speaker placed under the water.

“He has probably already started his search for Eros,” said Aigokeros, who also spoke normally while under the water. Apparently, he was using telepathy to transmit his thoughts through the water.

As for Sagittarius, neither of them were especially worried. The centaur was originally well suited for covert ops, so he almost never showed himself in front of his comrades anyway. That had started happening more often after Lufas had come back, but disappearing like this was much closer to his original style. He was surely already transformed into some sort of merfolk, just like he had become a beastfolk in Draupnir, and he was already searching.

“More importantly, do you know where Eros is?” Aigokeros wondered.

“I am getting a return from just up ahead. Let's go.”

Libra indicated a direction as she shifted the wings on her back and moved through the water as if she were flying. Aigokeros followed after her, also seeming like he was flying. After spending some time traveling, the two of them eventually came upon a strange group floating in front of them with their arms

crossed. Their leader was a human-shaped fish.

A merman, perhaps? But he's not shaped like one. Mermen aren't exactly pleasing to the eye, but this group is even worse.

The life-form's arms lazily floated to its sides as it swayed left and right. Its tail dragged on the seafloor, and it jumped to move, almost like a frog. Its face was unique, to put it lightly, and none of its features could be described as anything but creepy. The fish-man looked a lot like a deep-sea creature.

"Is that a merfolk?"

"No idea. They are in our way, in any case, so they must be eliminated."

Aigokeros made a swiping motion with his right arm. At the same time, a huge demon arm materialized holding a scythe.

There was a flash. The demon arm swung, copying the motion of Aigokeros's right arm, and the large scythe instantly massacred the merfolk look-alikes. The two of them passed by the corpses easily and without a second glance.

"This species was not around two hundred years ago. I wonder if they mutated from something?" Libra mused.

"Possibly. The deep sea is similar to my homeland, Helheim, in that it is thick with mana. It would not be strange to see those environs cause a change, like with us demons," explained Aigokeros.

Like water, mana flowed from high to low. The reason why had been researched for many years, but it had yet to be discovered. Either way, it was a fact that places underground or at the bottom of the ocean more easily experienced large amounts of pooled mana. That was why the underground world of Helheim was thick with it, and thanks to that influence, the creatures within the realm changed to become demon-like. Humanity was no exception to this, and those who lived in Helheim had been changed by it, becoming the forefathers of the modern vampire, so it wasn't exactly strange to see the same thing happening at the bottom of the ocean.

Libra and Aigokeros had expected that the enemies just now were merfolk who had been affected by mana and mutated, becoming monsters. Most likely, the Goddess had yet to notice this either, so in a sense, they were a new breed

of monster for the new age.

“So we have Eros and an unknown breed of monsters to deal with. Seems like this will be some trouble.”

“That may be so, but what we have to do doesn’t change. We must fulfill our master’s orders.”

“I would have done that even without your reminder.”

It didn’t matter how mysterious or powerful the enemy was. Libra and Aigokeros didn’t waver a centimeter as they continued on to their destination. Eventually, they would come upon an underwater capital draped in splendor.

12

“I see, yes.”

There were currently four people sitting around a table talking in a private room for the royal family in the undersea palace—a place where only Pisces, the king, and any women he chose could normally enter. Well, only three of them were actually talking. The girl, Suirat, whom Pisces had brought along because he’d taken a liking to her, was quiet because she couldn’t keep up with the conversation. Libra and Aigokeros talked of Lufas’s revival and all the events up until now while Pisces nodded along.

“Lufas’s revival is a joyous thing. There’s no doubt. However, why are you people the ones to come to me? Isn’t there someone better, like Pollux or Aries? Someone decent?” asked Pisces.

“I see. So you are unsatisfied with us. Then maybe you would rather have had Scorpius and Leon?”

“Don’t joke. If they came, I’d have chased them away immediately. I’ll give a hard pass to dealing with a berserk lesbian and a musclebound idiot. Leon’s especially bad. He’s just so hard to look at.”

Pisces always judged people primarily by their looks. That might just have been to be expected of the child of Alovenus, who was touted as the goddess of

beauty. He fundamentally hated ugly or stuffy-looking people. To him, the beautiful but artificial Libra and the goat demon who was like all the bad emotions of the world come together were not all that welcome. If he had to have been sent someone from the Twelve Stars, then he would rather have entertained Aries or Pollux, who were pleasing to the eye, to come. Of course, that was predicated on Aries never undoing his human form.

Also, the one he least wanted to see was a certain pervert horse who liked to walk around with his lower half exposed. *I have no good memories of that horse... I'm still traumatized by the memory of talking to a girl I liked in town one day, only to find out it was that pervert horse in disguise.*

"Also, don't refer to us as Eros. We already have one person whose joke is that his name keeps getting mistaken, and that's Taurus."

"What? You're wrong. We get Taurus's name wrong because it's confusing. There's no ill will behind it. We get yours wrong on purpose."

"That's even worse!" exclaimed Pisces.

"Well, it's not like it's all that incorrect either. Your real name *is* Eros. Right, Eros?"

"Yeah, Eros."

"You..."

Pisces dropped his chin into a hand unhappily, thinking, *This is why I hate these two. Neither Pollux nor Aries would call me by the wrong name on purpose, since she has common sense, and he's actually got a conscience. Well, sometimes Aries does get carried away by the mood, but he never says it with ill intent. But these two will. Especially Aigokeros; he'll do it especially spitefully. I don't get what goes on in Libra's mind either, so I have no idea if she has anything like ill will, but actions speak louder than words. My word, why are the Twelve Stars full of weirdos like these?* That was Pisces's honest thought, one that completely ignored himself.

"By the way, you need to do something about how you imitate Miss Lufas in the way you refer to yourself. Don't you think that's rude?" Aigokeros pointed out.

“Urgh...” Pisces could only groan in response.

As he said, Pisces’s way of referring to himself was done to imitate Lufas. Aigokeros and the others all knew that he’d been referring to himself as “the great me,” at least up until he’d met Lufas. Added to that, it was obvious that all the women who worked in this palace resembled Lufas in some way.

“Well, let’s just leave that aside. There is something more important to discuss.” Pisces didn’t seem to want to continue this thread of conversation, as he quickly moved to change the subject. *These things are separate. This goat has no right to say anything about it.* “Since Miss Lufas has revived, I’d love to run to her as soon as possible, but unfortunately, some circumstances prevent that.”

“So you’re saying there’s something you value more than our master? Is your love only worth that much?”

“Agghh, it’s so annoying to have you heckling me over every little thing! Unlike you, We have a large undersea kingdom to oversee. In pure area, my kingdom covers seventy percent of all of Mizgarz! Unlike you, with nothing to protect, We are different in every way!”

Pisces showily spread his arms as Libra and Aigokeros watched with cold gazes. Their faces screamed, “There he goes again,” and were no doubt infused with exasperation, but Pisces didn’t seem to mind.

“The unified state of the great sea, so named Skíðblaðnir. It spans one hundred and eight regions and three hundred cities, with a total population of over a hundred million. Has there ever been a ruler who has commanded such a large area and so many people in Mizgarz’s history?”

“Miss Lufas has already unified the world once.”

“Ah, We are scared by our own sheer talent for ruling! This talent, which has seen us create this in a mere two hundred years, is the world’s greatest treasure! And this ocean kingdom will be the engagement ring We offer to our beloved. Do you understand the difference between us? You lot are nothing but underlings, while We are a great king. You will never match us!”

“Sure, sure, LOLros.”

“Sure thing, Eros.”

“YOOOUUUUUUUUU!”

The way he said it was unpleasant, but his accomplishment was actually a great one. After all, in terms of area covered, Pisces’s kingdom surpassed that of the Devil King. At the moment, the devilfolk controlled over ninety percent of the world, while humanity had to make do with the leftover not-even-ten percent of land. However, that figure only included dry land, which didn’t even cover thirty percent of Mizgarz as a whole. The remaining seventy percent was taken up by a massive ocean, which was under Pisces’s rule.

That achievement was certainly not to be ignored. After all, his return to Lufas’s fold also meant that the ocean kingdom of Skíðblaðnir would be hers to do with as she pleased. In an instant, Lufas would suddenly become the greater power compared to the Devil King, reversing the current balance.

“However, my kingdom is facing a problem at the moment.”

“Your narcissism?”

“That certainly is a big problem.”

“No, you fools!” yelled Pisces. “We are currently at war after suffering an invasion from grotesque, malformed beings that call themselves the ‘deep ones.’”

After hearing the word “war,” Libra and Aigokeros turned to look at each other. It was certainly not a Twelve Stars-ish problem to have. With the power of the Twelve Stars, a problem like that could easily be overpowered with sheer brute force. It didn’t matter if they numbered in the thousands or even tens of thousands. With the insurmountable level difference, it would be easy to destroy them all at once, wiping them all out with a single destructive wide-area-of-effect spell. Such a feat was possible for those of the Twelve Stars who could be considered combatants. There was only one of them who couldn’t do such a thing, and that member was a certain crab who had no role other than that of a shield.

“Deep ones...” Aigokeros pondered the term. “Would you be referring to those merfolk who looked like deep-sea fish?”

“So you encountered them too? Yes, exactly. Those ugly things who don’t know their place have picked a fight with me. I cannot leave this ocean without decimating them from the root. Otherwise, this beautiful kingdom, which I took all this trouble to build, will get trampled.”

“Then why not just go and destroy them? We’ve fought them ourselves, and they were just a herd of small fry.”

“Those are just the vanguard. The problem is the one behind them.” Pisces clicked his tongue with an unpleasant expression as he mussed his hair wildly. “Their leader is a wicked god of the ocean, or so it’s claimed. We have no idea exactly when it appeared. The only thing We can say for sure is that it’s been living in the deeps for quite a long time. Put simply, it is an abomination transformed by mana. You can think of it as a monster that appeared normally, completely unwilled by the Goddess. Just like you, Aigokeros.”

“Is it strong?”

“Very. I’ve only gotten in some light skirmishes with it, but its power should be considered at the Twelve Stars class. It might even be as strong as the Dragon King, as far as underwater combat is concerned.”

After hearing that it was Twelve Stars class, the lax underestimation disappeared from Libra’s and Aigokeros’s faces.

Monstrosities that were naturally corrupted by mana were not something to be underestimated. After all, many of Lufas’s subordinates, including the Twelve Stars, fit into that category. The biggest names included Karkinos, Aigokeros, Fenix, and Hydras.

“Are the deep ones the same as it?”

“No, they’re just a new species that sprung up in these past two hundred years or so. I would exile those who had committed particularly serious crimes to the deeps, and at some point, they became monsters under the control of this wicked god.”

“So this is all your fault?” asked Libra.

“Ah, that’s why they were all male,” Aigokeros said.

“What fools you are, to be unable to understand our mercy.”

It was just like Pisces the womanizer to basically only exile men to the deeps. Of course, there were female criminals as well, but they had probably gotten off with much lighter sentences than the men. That was why there were no women among the deep ones, and given that, they would eventually go extinct. Basically, while they wouldn't be executed on the spot, those criminals who deserved death sentences would eventually die anyway. It was simply a delayed execution. In other words, this was a war with their lives on the line, and they were charging in with the intention of saying, “Hand over your women, you stupid harem-making bastard!” It was quite the pathetic reason for war.

The wicked god, being made to go along with this, was also quite pitiful. In fact, whatever this monster was might actually have been quite nice, given how he was going along with this. At the very least, it was commendable that the wicked god had gone all this time without committing any evil acts at all, even with all that power.

“Understood. Then let us help,” Libra said.

“Waiting is too much,” Aigokeros admitted. “Let's hurry up and dig these deep ones or whatever out by the roots.”

Neither Libra nor Aigokeros cared much about what happened to the merfolk. However, things were different if this kingdom would become Lufas's property. It wouldn't do to hand over a ruined kingdom, after all. Also, if they were to leave this wicked god alone, it might prove a nuisance to their master. There was no reason not to help.

“Hmm. Help, huh? Your personalities aside, I do trust your strength. Fine. I, Pisces, will specially allow you to help. Be honored. Well, this would have been handled with or without you though.”

“All right then. Let's just leave, Aigokeros,” said Libra.

“We need to go report that Eros has died,” Aigokeros chimed in.

Libra and Aigokeros got up and turned to leave, but Pisces stopped them by throwing away his arrogant demeanor and crying, “W-Wait, don't go! Okay, I get it, I'm thankful! I'm so grateful. Just help me!”

In the end, Pisces was the one who most wanted to do something about this situation, and the help of two members of the Twelve Heavenly Stars was something he'd pay an arm and a leg for. After all, if this situation wasn't resolved, he would never be able to run to Lufas's side. To him, that was basically torture.

"Good. Then let us go immediately."

"W-We're going already? But I haven't formed my army yet."

"Why would we need something like that? Just us will be enough."

In wars, quantity weighed much more heavily than quality. This applied to all places and all times; it was a golden rule that had been in place since ancient times and would probably never change in the future. The side with more soldiers would win. That was the true form of war.

Of course, tactics, strategies, weapons, terrain, and weather all played a part, and there were examples of forces with an overwhelming numbers disadvantage winning the day. However, numbers always mattered first and foremost. Such examples didn't change the fact that outnumbering the enemy gave you a huge advantage. But this group consisted of catastrophes with wills, the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars. Catastrophes didn't obey the laws and theories of war. If three large meteors rained down upon a country, then it would be easily destroyed, no matter how large an army it had.

"I struggle to believe this, but are you saying that your long life as a king has dulled your skills?" asked Libra, provoking him.

"Who do you think you're talking to? We are Pisces, the child of god! That would never happen!" Pisces laughed as he opened the palace doors.

The merfolk in the area turned to look, wondering what had happened, but they would never have expected that just three people would be charging into the enemy.

"We're setting off! Don't lag behind, servants!"

"Who's a servant, Eros?"

"Don't get ahead of yourself, Eros."

“Call me Pisces!”

Pisces snapped his fingers. By doing so, he instantly changed from his previous thin robe to a lustrous and gaudy set of golden armor. The mantle attached to his back flapped in the ocean current, and he held a trident in his hands. As if answering his declaration, a thirty-meter-long giant orca—an orvahl—cried out, allowing him to climb on its back.

“Heh ha ha ha ha ha! HAAAA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA!” The king of the ocean laughed idiotically heartily as he crossed his arms on top of his orvahl.

The other two members of the Twelve Stars followed behind him, looking exasperated.

The undersea capital was quickly left behind as the three of them entered the ocean’s depths. Several deep ones appeared in an attempt to stop their advance, but they were just common rabble. A supersonic attack from the orvahl had them gushing blood from every opening in their bodies, which opened them up to be chewed up and eaten by its sharp teeth.

The orvahl, which Pisces had personally raised as a pet, was level 500, so there was no need for Pisces to deal with the small fry himself.

13

The deep ocean was a place full of mysteries and wonder, even while being on the same planet. This fact didn’t just apply to Mizgarz; even Sei’s home planet, a place far more advanced than Mizgarz, had yet to fully uncover its mysteries. Unlike the fish humanity often laid eyes on, the denizens of the depths were strange and unique in their forms, such as fish with transparent heads or jellyfish that shone in the seven colors of the rainbow. There were even creatures that somehow resembled spiders, aberrant fish with mouths that nearly split themselves open to eat, and squid with transparent bodies. Creatures existed that were said to be able to survive in absolute zero and others who were unbothered by lethal amounts of radiation. Some could live for ten years without water and others were said to even have arrived from

space after surviving its vacuum.

If all of those creatures that made one give up and just say, “What if it came from space?” were actually mutants created by mana, calling them monsters would actually be rather conservative. But all these creatures and more lived in the deep oceans of Mizgarz, and the deep ones mixed those unique traits with a human form. In a word, they were aberrant. No matter how carefully one tried to choose their words to be as kind as possible, the words cute or cool would never come up. Just looking at them would scrape away at your sanity, and their looks could scare any opponent. One could only assume these monsters had changed in this way as an evil ploy to frighten their victims.

However, they were faced with an emotionless golem and a demon king from Hel, not to mention a literal child of god. Not a single one of them was mentally weak enough to be shaken just because of their opponent’s looks, and they simply continued to scatter each and every one of them as they moved ever onwards.

“So ugly... What unsightly things. As someone who lives in the same ocean, I’m ashamed that they are so different. You bastardized servants, don’t you dare show your repulsive forms to me ever again!” Pisces, who was letting his orvahl do all the fighting and was just sitting on top looking imperious, spat out words of contempt, not even trying to hide his disgust.

The deep ones took offense to that and charged him all at once, shouting words that couldn’t be understood. But Libra took that chance to sweep them all up with her assault rifle, destroying every last one of them.

“I have sensed a large life-form two kilometers ahead,” said Libra. “Its level...is over 910. We will make contact in several seconds. Are you all ready?”

Libra’s Search Eye was a skill that had the same effect as Lufas’s Observing Eye. If the target’s level was less than half that of the user’s, the user would be able to see all of its stats. If the target’s level was less than the user’s but over half, the user would only see the target’s level, HP, and SP bars. And if the target was a higher level than the user, the user would be able to see nothing.

Libra had her Search Eye activated, and she could see nothing about the enemy in front of her. Her level was the highest of the Twelve Heavenly Stars,

excluding Leon, at 910, so not being able to see anything meant that the enemy was over level 910.

“So it’s strong. To think there were still enemies like that left in the world...”

“It probably evaded notice from the Goddess, the Devil King, and even our master because it’s been living in the deep like this. If it had come to the surface in these two hundred years with our master gone, the map of Mizgarz might have looked completely different.”

Its being over level 910 meant that it was a disaster-class monster without any doubt. At the very least, it had enough power to be able to flatten Mizgarz in a couple days, at an estimate. The fact that it had spent all this time underwater having small skirmishes was something like a minor miracle for those on land. So in a sense, Pisces had been protecting the world all this time.

“Hmph, levels are simply strength boiled down into numbers. We have never relied on something like that. Mother tried to micromanage things like that, but that is why she keeps failing. Things are simple. If you’re strong, you’re strong, and if you’re weak, you’re weak. That’s all it is,” said Pisces.

In levels, there was at least a difference of 90 between the enemy and any one of the Twelve Stars. This was not a small gap. In fact, a gap this large could overturn the three-versus-one disadvantage.

However, Pisces laughed, undaunted. “As if I care if it’s level 900 or level 1000. We’ll be the ones to win! The heavens have decided it.”

“You’re filled with baseless confidence, as always.”

“It’s not baseless. After all, We are the great king of the ocean and a child of god.” Pisces continued to stare straight forward with his arms crossed.

Following that, Libra and Aigokeros also looked up and got ready.

Ahead of them was a mountainous and abhorrent monstrosity. Countless tentacles extended from an octopus-like head. Each tentacle was covered in scales and ended in talons. From its back grew bat wings, similar to what Aigokeros had, and its entire body glowed green. Its mouth, hidden by the tentacles, split into four flaps vertically and horizontally, while the inside of the mouth was lined to the brim with fangs. There were two caverns in the head

around where the eyes should've been, and they glowed red. However, there were no actual eyes there. Upon closer inspection, there were eyes all over the tentacles at irregular intervals, and they swayed and shifted focus all over.



Eventually, all the eyes turned at once to focus on Pisces, Libra, and Aigokeros.

“■■■■■■■■■■”

Something came out of the thing’s mouth, something so strange it could neither be called words nor even sound, but could still only be described as a voice. However, what it said could not be understood or translated at all. At least, there was no doubt that the sound could not be recreated by a human, and it would be impossible to render into writing either.

Hearing that voice, the orvahl that Pisces had been riding immediately fell into a panic and started to thrash around. All this just from its voice. Just its voice caused a level 500 monster to lose its wits and sink into the throes of terror.

Libra immediately shot the orvahl with a paralyzing shot to quiet it down before instantly turning her barrel towards the giant monstrosity. “Be careful. Its voice has an insanity effect on it. It is similar to Aigokeros’s ability.”

“Hmph, the nerve,” Aigokeros said.

Manipulating mental states was the area of Aigokeros’s specialty. Aigokeros flared up with a sense of rivalry towards the monstrosity and made himself giant, taking on his ominous demon form. His goat eyes shined as he attempted to lead the giant thing into insanity.

However, the monstrosity didn’t seem fazed at all. In fact, it replied to Aigokeros’s attempts in kind by releasing a pressurizing aura. It was a showdown between the demon king and a wicked god. Their habitats were different, but they were each born of high concentrations of mana, causing them to be mutated to the extreme.

The waves of power coming off the two of them stained the ocean black and caused fish for several kilometers around to lose their sanity and die of shock while screaming. A pair of male merfolk laughed incessantly as they stabbed each other with their weapons and died at the same time. Meanwhile, a sea creature with a long body like a snake’s chewed open its own belly, ending its life.

Their very existences represented calamity. Without even lifting a finger, those driven to insanity by them were ending their own lives. Such was the power of the wicked god and demon king; they were evil embodied. However, neither of the two who were in the center of this whirlpool of insanity were affected by the other.

“I expected this, but it looks like your manipulation is doing nothing.”

Libra launched anchors from her hip cannons. She aimed for the monstrosity's body, right at the part that contained a high density of important organs. Libra's eyes could see through matter, much like an X-ray on Earth would, and she could clearly make out the wicked god's innards through its tough skin. The shape and positioning of its organs was just as nonsensical as its form would suggest; nothing inside matched with any of Libra's data on living things. However, Libra was somehow able to determine which organs were important and which were not from the flow of its blood.

The anchors stabbed into the wicked god, seeming to have met no resistance at all, and Libra started to transmit the ultrasonic waves. The wicked god's body twitched as it reacted to the attack, and it let out a sound that was most likely a scream. But even if it was taking damage, it wasn't enough to be fatal.

The wicked god focused its gaze on Libra, and it extended all the tentacles growing from its head at once in an attempt at a counterattack. Libra instantly calculated her enemy's attack speed and her probability of dodging the swing. *Estimated speed: Mach 40,000... Dodge probability: thirty percent...*

The tentacles swarmed Libra, each one moving with a mind of its own. Libra prioritized dodging over her ultrasonic waves in order to avoid a direct hit. Meanwhile, she launched another attack of her own. She ejected the wings on the back of her Astraia M unit, and the eight wings changed into blades as they flew forward.

The eight blades each moved independently, spinning as they severed one tentacle after the other. The blades only cut down the tentacles Libra could not avoid. Aigokeros and Pisces helped her avoid the tentacles, but one of them managed to land a hit on a wing and destroyed it.

The loss of even a single wing blade created a gap in Libra's defenses, and the

tentacles took full advantage. However, Aigokeros swung with his scythe, reaping all the tentacles at once before they could land an attack on Libra. She took that chance to return the wings to her back, and now it was Pisces's turn to attack.

“Bow down, scum!”

Pisces moved at a speed so fast it looked like he'd disappeared. Maneuvering to a position over the wicked god, he swung his trident down at it. His single strike split the wicked god's head and even affected the space behind it, digging a straight line in the seafloor.

“HEH HA HA HA HA HA! What, is that all you got?! You're weak, you inferior thing!” Pisces laughed uproariously, sure of his victory. However, what happened the next moment froze him on the spot.

Its head was definitely split; there was no saving it. But it regenerated at an extreme rate. Meat welled up from the split, instantly swelling up. It was no normal regeneration either. The cut parts didn't knit back together. New meat grew from the split, and now there were two heads. When the three of them looked, they could see that the tentacles Aigokeros had severed had also doubled as they grew back.

“■■■■■”

The wicked god wriggled its tentacles, launching all three of its opponents at the same time. After being slammed into the seafloor, Libra quickly recovered and strafed with her assault rifle while Aigokeros shot a bullet of magic.

There was no time for the wicked god to avoid the blows, which cut a part of its body to ribbons upon impact. However, those wounds also repaired themselves in an instant, forming another chunk of meat and transforming an already-aberrant creature into something even more aberrant. The new chunk quickly dropped from the wicked god, becoming a miniature version of it.

The mini-god immediately made for Libra, biting onto the wings on one side of her Astraia unit. Libra quickly reacted, pulverizing its head with her steel fist before saying, “The Astraia Type M's damage rate is at twenty-two percent... Speed has dropped fifteen percent.”

Added to the damage from earlier, the Astraia Type M had now lost two wings. Libra herself had yet to be damaged, but she had taken quite the hit to her agility. It was especially dangerous because if Libra were to lose her Astraia M in this underwater battle, she would automatically sink to the ocean floor. Taking any more damage was incredibly dangerous.

“■■■■■...”

The wicked god muttered something as its multitude of eyes wriggled in their sockets. In an instant, the three Twelve Stars were assaulted with an overwhelming feeling of pressure. It was as if an invisible hand had reached out and were crushing them.

“Tch! This insolent... It’s manipulating the water, making it denser around us. So it plans to just crush us like this...!”

Pisces’s expression twisted, and he threw his trident. But the thrown weapon never reached its target; the trident crumpled in on itself in mid-flight. However, while that was happening, Libra’s fist had launched from her elbow and made contact with the wicked god, and once it was distracted, Aigokeros’s scythe rammed home. The scythe was imbued with an instant-death effect, but unfortunately, it didn’t work on the wicked god, though that was to be expected. Even so, Aigokeros continued to swing his scythe undaunted, carving a straight furrow in the monstrosity’s body.

“We’ll press the advantage before it regenerates,” said Aigokeros. “Follow me!”

Aigokeros gathered mana in both hands, and he unleashed his specialty, Deneb Algedi. The spell gouged out the wicked god’s body, and Libra followed up with her anchors. The anchors stabbed into the monstrosity’s head, and the ultrasonic waves destroyed the innards. After that, Pisces leapt upwards, determined to press the advantage.

“You won’t be able to act big forever, you gigantic unsightly monstrosity! We are the great king of the ocean! Learn your place...scum!”

Pisces howled, and his mouth split from the sides. Scales appeared all over Pisces’s body, and his once graceful face quickly changed into that of a monster. A horn grew from his head, and he grew even larger than the wicked god. Pisces

had become a snake...no, a dragon.

There were five dragons which represented the Goddess in this world. While Pisces did not even closely match them for size, he still resembled an ouroboros strongly, and he gave off a powerful divine feeling. If there were anyone present who knew of Levia, Svel's guardian deity, they'd probably notice that it resembled Pisces as he was now.

Pisces bit into the wicked god and ascended, his gigantic body bursting out of the ocean and exposing his form to those on land as he continued on out of the atmosphere into space. Just like that, he used all his power to push the wicked god into the moon before opening his large mouth and gathering a destructive light in it.

"Disappear from my sight!" Pisces fired.

He fired, and fired, and fired, and fired, and fired, and fired, and fired, and fired, and fired.

If he were to fire this beam at Mizgarz, it wouldn't quite go as far as destroying the entire planet, but it would wipe out all civilizations from the face of it, and he was unleashing multiple beams of this power mercilessly and unreservedly at the wicked god. Each impact carved a deeper depression into the moon, changing its shape. Once the moon had completely warped from its once spherical shape, Pisces once again bit into the wicked god, which was now nothing more than a destroyed husk. This time, he descended back towards Mizgarz.

Once again, the two returned to the deeps as Pisces slammed the monstrosity into the sea bed before finally resuming his human form.

"Heh... Heh HA HA HA HA HA! Have you learned your lesson?! In the end, something like you could never match up to us!" Pisces reveled in his victory, laughing heartily.

Meanwhile, Libra calmly observed the enemy without growing impatient, noticing that its signs of life hadn't weakened in the slightest. "No, it's not over yet," she said, speaking up.

"What?"

Libra was proved correct when the wicked god got back up. It had hideous burns all over its body, but outside of the wound to its body dealt by Aigokeros, almost all its wounds were done healing by now.

14

Just what is invincibility? What does a power that will never suffer defeat look like? That was the eternal question of all those who lived their lives in battle, a pinnacle for all of them to reach.

Is there a combination of the abundant skills, magic, and heaven-arts available here in Mizgarz that will allow someone to always grasp victory? There was not a single person who had reached level 1000 who had not asked themselves that question.

Among them, the Vampire Princess Benetnasch had come up with an idea for an answer. That idea had been to combine high HP and percentile HP regeneration. Mizgarz was subject to a damage ceiling, and no hit could deal more than 100,000 damage at a time. Since that was the case, if someone were to raise their max HP high enough that their percentile HP regeneration were to recover 99,999 HP every tick, then every blow would simply be recovered in the next second, damage would never stay around, and in theory, this person would never lose.

In reality, Benetnasch had gotten exceedingly close to this ideal, and if the damage dealt to her wasn't serious enough, she would simply regenerate it immediately. Of course, that wasn't the only thing she had going for her, but in terms of defense, that was probably her strongest feature. That was why she never bothered defending in battle and was able to put all her effort and power into attacking. But now, there was one other being that embodied that ideal.

“■■■■■■■■...■■■■■■”

The abhorrent god howled. Each little piece of it emitted sound and smell, and everything about it summoned up a strong, primal feeling of discomfort and disgust as it tried to drag those around it into insanity.

In front of the wicked god, whose very existence could be called a nightmare, Aigokeros still stood unmoved. After all, he was the king of demons, and someone who did very much the same thing. They were even in that respect. The huge forms of the wicked god and the demon king once again locked themselves in close combat, causing Libra to mutter, "Time required to begin regenerating wounds... Calculated at 0.05 seconds. Time needed for full recovery: 0.6 seconds. How annoying," as she looked up at them.

Pisces's face scrunched up after hearing what Libra had said. The time needed for it to make a full recovery was less than a second, fast enough for any normal human or monster to not even be able to register what had happened. It wouldn't be too far to say that it regenerated wounds as soon as they were dealt to it.

Of course, the fighters here were easily able to intervene in that regeneration. It was more than possible for them to throw out attacks within hundredths of a second, faster than it could start to regenerate. And no matter how ridiculous its regeneration abilities were, there was no reason it couldn't be defeated by killing it faster than it could heal. All they had to do was keep hitting it faster than its regenerative capabilities could compensate for.

For example, let's use Benetnasch once again. If she were here, then she could easily have made dozens of attacks in the time the wicked god would have needed to start regenerating, and it'd have been possible for her to drive it to the point of death in a mere moment.

Ironically, the strategy most effective against Benetnasch was used by Benetnasch herself. Lufas would've been a step behind Benetnasch, but she could also push through with the speed of her attacks. However, neither the Vampire Princess nor the Black-Winged Conqueror were present. There were only Aigokeros, Libra, and Pisces. Hypotheticals about if they had been present would have no meaning. What was important was how the three who were here could grasp victory.

Pisces suggested a method of breaking out of this while weaving past attacking tentacles, saying, "We can just attack it faster than it can regenerate. It's simple."

But it was quickly shot down by Libra. “That’s not a realistic plan. The enemy’s level is higher than ours. It’s not like some sort of sandbag that won’t fight back. We won’t be able to conveniently beat up on it with no retaliation.”

As was noted before, attacking faster than it could regenerate was a viable solution, so what Pisces had said was not wrong. However, the wicked god would, of course, attack back, defend, and dodge. It would probably also be able to heal itself using its skills, which meant that in order to succeed with that strategy, there needed to be an overwhelming speed advantage on the Twelve Stars’ side, enough to leave behind their enemy in the dust.

However, the wicked god and Libra’s group were even with regards to speed. Of course, this level of speed was already several levels above what any normal warrior could keep up with, but given that they were fighting in the same time frame, the strategy mentioned by Pisces was not realistically feasible.

“But...luckily for us, we have the natural enemy of all natural regenerators. Look.”

Libra pointed to the wicked god’s side. The wound Aigokeros had gouged out of it earlier had yet to be healed. Its body, previously destroyed by Libra’s anchors and Pisces’s beams, was already almost fully regenerated by now. Only the wound caused by Aigokeros was left.

Aigokeros’s attacks carried an irreversible curse. Once the wound was taken, it couldn’t be healed until the curse had run its course. Heaven-arts and items needn’t be discussed, and there was no point in trying to cut the affected part away. In fact, even elixirs and amritas found themselves powerless in the face of this curse. In other words, Aigokeros was the natural counter to this aberrant wicked god.

“So we’ll have to rely on him, huh? I don’t really like it, but...” Pisces trailed off.

“Then will you become the lynchpin of this fight?” Libra asked. “With your unique skill—its name was Alrescha, right? Using that to win would be...possible.”

“Don’t joke. I will not use my skill on such an ugly opponent.”

“Thought not. Then stop complaining and help support Aigokeros.”

“That’s all fine and great. Just hurry up and start fighting! How long are you planning to leave me out here alone?!” Aigokeros’s angry shout interrupted the other two as they were arguing about the best strategy to take. Ever since the conversation started, he’d been left to deal with the wicked god by himself, and he was starting to reach his limits.

Libra rejoined the fight without bothering to reply. She bounded upwards and stuck her bent knee out of her skirt. As the skirt flipped up, it revealed parts that were normally hidden, including the golem-like joint. Her kneecap opened up and the cannon inside fired. The round impacted against the wicked god and exploded, and Pisces lost no time in following up.

“Maelstrom!”

The whirlpool created by high-tier Water magic caught the wicked god, stopping it from moving, and Aigokeros was not the kind of person to let a chance like that go. As if he’d been waiting for this opening the entire time, he shot a black undulating bullet at the wicked god’s chest area.

But the wicked god’s vitality was not something to be underestimated. It looked for a moment like the monstrosity was shaken, but the next second, it acted using all its tentacles as if it’d never taken any damage. The thing launched an attack in all directions to beat down its three opponents.

“■■■■■■■■■■!!!” As always, the wicked god’s shout could not be translated into any language, and it thrashed around as if it’d lost its temper.

The wicked god now had several hundred tentacles to work with, as it had gained extra ones due to its regenerations, which meant that this monstrosity could attack over a hundred times at once. This fierce barrage of strikes could not be perfectly defended against, even by those who boasted high defensive capability, like Libra, Aigokeros, and Pisces. This was especially true of Libra’s Astraia M, which was at its limit now. Even though Libra herself was more than capable of keeping up the fight, her attachable equipment was not nearly as durable as she was.

“The Astraia Type M...is over eighty percent damaged. Looks like this is it.”

This attachment was a golem that Lufas had made in order to help Libra move in the water, but with this much damage, it was no longer useful. Now, it was no longer anything but a flashy accessory. A golem that was of no use and only existed for show was nothing more than a wretched piece of garbage. At least, that was what Libra thought. If she was to ever get this bad she would herself have wanted to be destroyed rather than be left without a purpose. A golem's *raison d'être* was to be useful to its master and fulfilling that was more important than Libra's own life. So as a fellow golem, Libra decided to give her broken wings one last chance to shine.

"Astraia Type M: Purge!"

Libra's broken wings separated from her back along with her declaration and shot towards the wicked god. This was the last weapon available to the Astraia Type M. Basically, it was a last-ditch charge that used itself as a weapon. Even though even more of it was shaved away by the monstrosity's waving tentacles, the set of wings managed to impact the wicked god. When it did, a bright white flash erupted from the impact site.

"Self-destruct!"

There was no lag between Libra's order and the Astraia Type M following it and exploding. Libra showed no reaction towards the golem that had just brilliantly fulfilled its duty and fought till the end. The fight was still ongoing, and taking advantage of the opening created by the Type M's explosion would be the ultimate way to show gratitude. So even while exercising restraint, Libra quickly brought her greatest weapon to bear.

"Brachium!"

Libra shut both herself and her enemy in a field of light and unleashed the scales' attack, which inflicted maximum damage to all targets no matter who they were. Swallowed up in the light of Brachium, the wicked god was blown to smithereens with not even a single tentacle left, and in that moment, Aigokeros's curse hit. The tentacles had already started to regrow, but before they finished, Aigokeros's attack shaved away at the wicked god. He felt the feedback of his strike landing. *At this speed, I think I can get in one more hit before it starts to regenerate.*

However, the situation was not favorable; at this point, Libra was basically out of the fight. Even though the damage she'd taken was light, she wouldn't be able to keep up with the fight now that she'd lost all her mobility. Of course, she was still capable of walking along the ocean floor and providing supporting fire, but it was still a big blow to their combat potential.

The wicked god opened its huge mouth and aimed at Libra, firing off a magic bullet. *That's strong enough to take an arm*, Libra judged, so she moved to block it so as to protect her head and chest. But at that moment, a magic arrow rushed past her and met the bullet in mid-flight, canceling it out.

"That's...!"

Libra was modestly surprised as she was caught by someone behind her and was quickly carried upwards, though the one who was probably most surprised here was Pisces. As for why, well, they'd just received completely unexpected reinforcements.

"Y-You're... Suirat?"

They were joined by Suirat, the apprentice maid whom Pisces had just set his eyes on. It was the girl that he was going to have accompany him that night because her hair color was the same as Lufas's. But surprisingly, she was moving at the same speed as Pisces and the others—in fact, she was even faster. Seeing that, Pisces instantly understood what was going on. *This one's...not a normal merfolk!* In front of his eyes, Suirat yelled out, "Everyone, listen! I've just sent a missive to Miss Lufas! She will now be using Alkaid!"

That was when Lufas activated Alkaid. She burst through the level cap and dragged the rest of the Twelve Heavenly Stars along with her to their own level caps. The problem was, how did this girl who'd never even met Lufas do such a thing like it was only natural?

Actually, the skill Alkaid was something only made recently as well, so it was strange that she knew of that too. With all this evidence piled up, Pisces finally figured it out, however. He realized who he'd just ordered to attend to him in the night, and it was a truth that he would rather have remained ignorant to.

"Y-You're... No way!!!"

“I certainly am,” Suirat replied with a deep and thick voice.

Her body was wrapped in light. Along with some uselessly sparkly effects, the young mermaid changed forms... Rather, she undid her disguise. She was now a man with the build of a seasoned warrior, complete with a rugged face and thick eyebrows. His sculpted body was like iron, and he wielded a bow in his hands. His lower half changed from a fish into a horse, and once Pisces realized his dreadful prediction had come true, he was assaulted with an overwhelming urge to vomit.

“I, Sagittarius the Archer, one of the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars, have arrived.”

“GODDAMMMIIIIIIITTTT! YOU TRICKED US! WE WERE TRIIIIICCKKKKEEDDDD!!!”

“In order to deceive the enemy, you must start with your friends.”

“JUST THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU’RE DOING! YOU’RE A HUGE, RUGGED MAN! DON’T CHANGE INTO A NICE GIRL LIKE THAT!” Pisces objected while fully in tears, but he was flatly and emotionlessly ignored by Sagittarius.

He didn’t think he’d really done anything that strange. He’d received the order to find Pisces, and the easiest way to get close to him was to assume the form of a beautiful mermaid. After seeing the women who worked in the palace, Sagittarius had realized that Pisces was gathering women who looked like their master, and so he’d changed his hair color to resemble Lufas’s. Everything had been done in the name of efficiency, so Sagittarius didn’t consider himself to have a hobby or habit of cross-dressing. Sagittarius had indeed done all of that in seriousness.

“Now, it’s time for the comeback. We’re going to decide this all at once.”

Sagittarius, with no ill will, tried to wrap everything up and get the fight restarted, while Pisces could only retort in a tired mutter, “We would rather defeat you than the wicked god.”

Power rose explosively inside Aigokeros, Pisces, and Sagittarius. Their master, Lufas, surpassed her own limits and brought the rest of them up with her, so they were now at level 1000 and bumping up against the limits set by the Goddess. Gaps in levels were never something to ignore, and the bigger the gap was, the more important it got.

For example, the difference between a level 1 and a level 2 was not much, even though the level difference was double that of the level 1. The level 1, in this case, would still be more than able to defeat their opponent, though even a one-level difference was not something to underestimate at low levels. However, if the fight were between a level 10 and a level 20, then the difference would be insurmountable by normal means. If you went even further and compared a level 100 to a level 200, then there would be no overturning the foregone conclusion.

The level difference between the Twelve Stars members and the wicked god was 200. Even Libra had to deal with a ninety-level difference. The wicked god must also have realized how strange Aigokeros and the rest were to be able to deal with this difference. It could not use language, but there was still no doubt it understood that the delicate balance of this battle had tipped irreversibly just now.

“Now then, let’s end this, mutated one. In respect of your strength, I will also use my full abilities. Bear witness to the true form of the demon king, Aigokeros!”

Lifting the level restriction on the Twelve Stars meant that they were able to exhibit their original powers. In the past, Aigokeros had been feared as the demon king of Hel, and now, his shackles had been taken off.

The goat demon’s eyes shined red as he unfurled his wings. His real body—the old gentleman who had stayed at the projection’s feet up until now—disappeared as he completely assimilated with his projection. And that wasn’t all. All the mana in their surroundings started to gather around him. It was just like what happened in Draupnir with Mercurius.

“Gather around me, my dark power!”

By absorbing the black mana, Aigokeros’s phantom became real. His lower

half, which had up until now been swaying incorporeally in the water like a fish, turned into a solid set of furred legs. His body grew even bigger than the already gigantic one hundred meters tall that it had been maintaining previously, becoming over one kilometer in height and still growing.

All of Mizgarz became swathed in dark clouds as thunder resounded. The entire world trembled in fear at the coming of the demon king. The demon king grasped the wicked god as his goat head broke through the clouds and into the stratosphere. At this point, all this was clearly visible from space. It looked like there was a giant goat demon the size of a small planet growing out of Mizgarz.



“Goodbye, mutated one. You may be able to withstand the attack I am about to hit you with...but you will most likely never be able to return to this planet. This world is my master’s...” He paused. “But I, Aigokeros, as a similar being of mana, will formally recognize that you also possess the qualification to rule.”

Aigokeros did not hate this aberrant god. In fact, he felt that it was the only one in this world he could call a brother. It was a true being of mana, unlike the fakes that were the devilfolk. There was no way Aigokeros could dislike that. If not for the presence of Lufas Maphaahl, Aigokeros might have been happy to split this world in two and share it with the wicked god. That was how much Aigokeros respected it.

Unfortunately, the Black-Winged King already existed. This world was already spoken for, so there was no place for such a foreign god here, and Aigokeros didn’t want to make one. *There is no need for two true kings, and I alone am enough as a loyal retainer.*

“If you survive, then exert your supremacy on some other world.”

Aigokeros swung his arm, flinging the wicked god out into space. As a final token of struggle, the wicked god activated a unique skill. In that instant, the world was quickly rewritten, starting with the wicked god itself, and a foreign law was introduced into this world which was under the iron grip of the Goddess.

It was seeing a dream, and it was trying to replace reality with it, inverting sanity and insanity in the process. The damage ceiling disappeared, as did the level limit. The wicked god conceived its own world, one which was unbound by the Goddess’s rules, and in which it would unveil even more power and finally become serious. This was the wicked god’s unique skill. It could rewrite the rules of the world, inverting reality and dream and pulling out power surpassing level 1000.

It was a fearsome power. However, it was slightly too late in revealing this power. Aigokeros was not so slow as to allow the effect of the skill to finalize. In fact, since Aigokeros was so close, he was also included in the effects of the skill and had his level limits unleashed, boosting his level from 1000 to 1350. Level 1350 was not just a new ceiling either; it was Aigokeros’s true level when not

being suppressed by anything. Unfortunately, unlike Lufas and Benetnasch, he was unable to rip apart the Goddess's laws, and so he stayed at level 1000. How ironic, though, that he should become unburdened by such laws by the hands of his enemy, the wicked god.

With his power surpassing normal limits, Aigokeros opened his mouth and condensed a colossal amount of mana. The wicked god attempted to evade, but it was stopped by the jaws of Pisces, who had shaped himself into a dragon once more. Just like that, the wicked god was flung away.

“Disappear!”

Dark light exploded out of Aigokeros's mouth with the ferocity of a star, its black shine seeming to bring with it an endless sinister darkness along with the obvious destruction. The attack of black light, a seeming contradiction, impacted the wicked god, instantly sending it flying to the ends of space.

There was no chance to escape from Aigokeros's attack as he was now, with all his prodigious attack power. The blow was further followed up by the use of Al Nassr, which could ignore distance. The two flashes of light from these attacks twisted together in a screw, further improving each other as they sent the wicked god farther and farther away. It would continue to carry the wicked god away even farther, for years, decades, or even centuries, over many tens or even hundreds of light-years. The wicked god would most likely be carried past stars, solar systems, galaxies, and even galaxy clusters, to be literally carted off to an outer world.

From here on, Aigokeros would have no way of knowing what happened to the wicked god. It might end up worshiped in whatever place it ended up, or it might even achieve peace after landing in a place with no life. Either way, there was only one thing that Aigokeros could say on the matter, and that was that the wicked god probably would not die. It would surely continue to survive somewhere in space, just like Aigokeros was. *We'll probably never meet again*, Aigokeros believed, even as he thought it a little sad.

The mana dispersed, and Aigokeros returned to his normal size. Pisces struck up conversation while leaking out a cold sweat. “Hmph... I suppose that is only to be expected of the demon king of Hel, the only one to be ‘sealed’ into the

Twelve Heavenly Stars because Miss Lufas thought you too dangerous.”

Aigokeros differed from the other Twelve Heavenly Stars. As was noted before, he was the only one whose cruel nature had been deemed dangerous by Lufas, causing her to capture him so as to be able to watch over him. If he had been left to his own devices, he could have become a bigger threat to humanity than the devilfolk, and Lufas knew that. Keeping him close this way was a method to limit Aigokeros’s level and stop him from being able to use his true power.

Even the Lion King Leon hadn’t caused Lufas to feel as much danger. Leon was the strongest of the Twelve Heavenly Stars; there was no one who would dispute that. However, the most evil of the Twelve Heavenly Stars would be the Demon King Aigokeros with a bullet. His birth was something not even the Goddess had expected. He was a naturally born monster that existed outside her script. That was why Aigokeros touted himself as a true being of mana, as well as why he loved and respected Lufas so much as someone who was also outside of the Goddess’s script, only with far more power than he. If it wasn’t for that, then he might have spread darkness all over Mizgarz as the Demon King by now.

“We find it hard to believe that there would be someone this powerful who would willingly accept this seal of subjugation instead of attempting to rule themselves,” said Pisces.

“There is only one true king, and that is our great Black-Winged Conqueror. If she believes it necessary, then I will happily accept a seal or even death. Such is my loyalty,” explained Aigokeros.

“How humble of you.”

Pisces snorted even as he felt relieved on the inside. He’d finally realized how lucky it was that Aigokeros wasn’t as selfish as Leon. *The fact that this guy adores Lufas might be the single luckiest stroke in all of Mizgarz.* Pisces was normally a very foolish person, but even then, the occasional peeks into his demonic nature Aigokeros showed was enough to give him the shivers.

“At any rate, this solves your problem. Will you be coming with us, Eros?”

“Let me finish preparing my successor first. Then We shall accompany you.

Also, We are not Eros.”

“Then we’ll be counting on you from now on, Eros.”

“I said don’t call me Eros!”

“Yeah, we’ll be counting on you, Pisces,” said Sagittarius.

“Shut up, pervert horse. Go die.”

Sagittarius seemed shocked even though he said nothing.

As Pisces made for the palace, he hid his smile from Libra and the others. They hadn’t changed in two hundred years, and Pisces found that strangely heartwarming. Of course, he’d never say that out loud, but the truth was he found these exchanges rather fun, though he still would rather be referred to as Pisces in the end.

* *

“It looks like Libra’s group has encountered Pisces.”

I leaned on a pillar in the ship as I opened and read the letter. There were two letters. The first had been sent less than a minute ago, and it was a request to activate Alkaid. Apparently there was something really strong lurking in the deeps that even they were having trouble with, so they wanted me to remove their limiter by using Alkaid. To be honest, that surprised me. I would never have expected there to be a monster that could give Libra, Aigokeros, Sagittarius, and Pisces together trouble.

The second letter was a report saying that Aigokeros had flung the monster out into space and that Pisces would be joining us. As for this one, I knew that without having to read the letter. I mean, I could see Aigokeros from here. I paused, considering the situation for a moment. *Actually, he was probably seen the whole world over.* To think that Aigokeros had a skill like that. He was so big, I actually thought I was being pranked. Wouldn’t he be able to kill a planet without even having to bust through the level cap?

“That was rather amazing, wasn’t it? I made fun of him by calling him a pet before, but even I might have been in danger from that,” Benet said, insincere.

I laughed derisively. “Stop with the modesty, Benet. In a straight fight, you’d

win eight or nine times out of ten.”

It was true that, in that state, Aigokeros was strong enough to give me a scare, but Benet was still scarier. When it came to a fight, his giant body would actually be a downside; he’d just be a huge target for Benet’s high-speed attacks, and would then be finished off by a Maiden who Fires the Silver Arrow. *In fact, Benet’s so strong it’s not even funny.* Still, that was a little bit of a waste. I only saw it for a moment, but that gross, weird monster that Aigokeros had sent flying was level 1000, and his HP was even higher than Leon’s, at 2,800,000. It’d become weaker if I were to capture it, of course, but I wanted to anyway, since it was so strong. It’d probably make for a really good HP tank. *Ah, but if I did that, then I guess Karkinos would lose his place.*

“By the way, where are we going next?”

I closed my eyes in response to Benet’s question as I considered the choices. At the moment, we were chasing after Dina, who had hidden herself, but we’d yet to find any clue or trail. We’d gone to several places she seemed like she’d go to, including Maphaahl Tower, but we had found nothing. *It looks like we’ll have to resort to something a little dangerous. Maybe... Yeah, like hitting up the Devil King’s place.*

I opened my eyes, was quiet for a moment, and told Benet my intentions. “We will be going to the devilfolk’s castle.”

“Oh ho.” Benet grinned wide at that, showing her fangs to the world.

The Devil King was probably the one who knew Dina the best. After all, he’d silently allowed Dina’s spy antics, meaning he’d known about Venus and had said nothing. Of course, it was possible that he just hadn’t figured it out, but that seemed a touch too foolish for someone capable of ruling over an entire race. Therefore, I had a feeling that he was holding on to some information that I was not privy to. It probably wouldn’t be a bad idea to have an honest heart-to-heart with him at least once. In the worst case, we could just escape.

“Sounds fun. So we’re finally going to settle things with them after two hundred years, huh?”

“That depends on how they act. We have no intention of stirring up anything.”

The devilfolk's castle would naturally have a lot of devilfolk and monsters in it, but to be honest, their numbers didn't matter. Even if there were tens of thousands... Actually, even if there were hundreds of millions of them, it wouldn't matter to me. Sure, quantity was the deciding factor to war, in theory, and it was claimed to directly affect the outcome of battles, but at my level, I'd left all those considerations behind me. No matter how high their numbers went, the impossible would stay impossible. In an extreme comparison, it would be like asking several hundreds of thousands of people to gather together and physically stop a nuclear missile that was about to hit them. It would be impossible.

Well, in the end, I'd be able to just use Pressure to intimidate the weaklings into submission.

"Change of plans. Our new heading is the dark continent..." I paused. "The Devil King's castle."

As soon as I gave my orders, the argonautai hurriedly got to work, turning to our new heading.

Now then, I wonder how this'll turn out? Will it be fortune or misfortune? Either way, all that's left is to accept what happens and keep moving forward.

16

It took no time at all to find the Devil King's castle. Apparently, the argonautai had known of it for a long time now. Well, I suppose it would only be natural for Castor to have at least looked up the location of the enemy's stronghold in these past two hundred years of flying around. It was situated in a wasteland on the dark continent with an especially high concentration of mana, and it looked like a large black castle that dominated the cliff it stood on. *Yep, it just screams, "I'm the final dungeon!"*

A bunch of monsters that mostly just looked scary were flying around on patrol. Meanwhile, dark clouds constantly blocked out sunlight, making sure that it was always nighttime in the surroundings. Thunder rumbled through the

area, completing the scene.

It's actually so according to template that it's rare to see these days. Also, every time I see a castle like this, the first thing that pops into my mind is that, like, couldn't you just collapse the cliff and defeat all the weak enemies inside all at once? Not like I'd do that here though. I wonder why big bads, like demon kings and stuff, love to build on top of sheer cliffs. Wouldn't it just be, like, super inconvenient? Honestly, I wouldn't live there.

Also, like, I'm not sure how to feel seeing just a castle in the middle of nowhere without any sort of capital or anything surrounding it. He's a king, so of course he's gotta be collecting taxes to live off of, but wouldn't this make it really hard to collect those taxes? Come on, build your stuff closer to a town at least. I considered things for a moment before internally admitting, Well, I shouldn't really be talking, though, given where Maphaahl tower is.

"Now then, what now?" asked Benet. "We could just bombard them from afar."

"Wait just a second. We didn't actually come here to fight. As long as they don't try anything, it should be fine to act peacefully. That being said, this somewhat-gloomy atmosphere is not great, is it?"

I looked up at the sky and shot some magic at it. It was just a simple, low-ranking spell, but it was enough to scatter the clouds. That single attack from me didn't leave even a speck of those dark clouds behind, and now the bright sun shined down upon the whole area. *Good, it's brighter now.*

I felt kind of guilty, seeing as how they tried so hard to bring about a last-dungeon-style atmosphere, but I preferred things brighter than that. However, just as I was feeling happy with myself, I noticed Benet glaring at me, looking like she had a bone to pick. *Ah, crap. I forgot she doesn't like the sunlight.*

She snapped her fingers, and in an instant, the bright noon sun changed into night. *So she used the moon-element spell "Moonlit Night," huh? She really does just fling around high-level magic like it's nothing.*

All my effort was wasted. "Benet—" I began, before being cut off.

"Shut up. Let's go."

I was about to complain, but Benet just went off on her own, showing that she wasn't willing to listen. Apparently, she was planning on just barging straight in. Well, trying to sneak around and find a back entrance to infiltrate from didn't seem worth it at this point, so I also agreed with the straightforward approach.

As we approached the castle, the monsters that were on patrol mobbed us, but they turned pale and ran as soon as Benet so much as looked at them. She didn't have the Pressure skill, but the monsters probably simply felt an instinctive fear for their lives. Truthfully, running was a great decision on their part. If they'd closed by even a meter—no, half that—then they would have definitely been sliced to ribbons.

When we reached the castle, we were stopped by an enormous steel door blocking our way. The door was over ten meters in size, enough for even a giant to fit through. Normally, this would be the moment where we would use an item or something to open the door, but we didn't need to worry about that. Benet simply put her hand to the door and forced it open with her strength alone. The lock? Oh, that. That was instantly squished out of shape. *I wonder if it was made out of tofu?*

"N-No way. That huge door... With her bare hands?!"

"That thing was made out of steel!"

"It should have weighed over fifty tons... Sh-she's a monster!"

Yeah, yeah. Thanks for the commentary. I just applied a quick Pressure skill on the paling devilfolk who were on the other side of the door and sent them to the floor. *Don't move a muscle, you hear? If you do, Benet'll kill you.*

As we entered, we were, of course, greeted by a gaggle of devilfolk guards, but they honestly didn't matter.

"You're in the way. Leave," I said.

And boom goes the Pressure. The guards, who were wearing sets of heavy-looking armor, instantly flattened onto the ground unmoving.

We passed by them and looked in on the meaninglessly wide interior of the castle. We were currently in the reception hall, and there were an aggravatingly

large number of paths available to us. First off, there were three passages to the left and right that led to who knew where for a total of six passages. There was also a set of stairs in front of us as well as two doors flanking the stairs on the bottom floor. Midway through the stairway was a picture of the Devil King, which the stairway split in two around, and at the top of the stairs were a further four passages on each side for a total of eight.

At this point, there were a total of sixteen ways we could go, and I was sure that each one we took would further branch off into places like barracks for the guards, kitchens, training rooms, and the like. This layout seemed appropriate for the final dungeon of an RPG, and I was impressed with how the heroes in those games could stand to cover all this area, all while dealing with random encounters.

“There’s way too many paths,” Benet said, annoyed.

She’s right. Checking each and every one of these would take too long. Is this complicated layout here in order to thwart invaders? I’d heard from somewhere that buildings like this were made purposefully obtuse so that any invaders couldn’t just immediately reach their most important goals.

“Searching around would be annoying. Let’s have one of them guide us.”

Benet chose a random devilfolk from the ones prone around us and grabbed him by the nape of the neck. The pitiful devilfolk with a mohawk who was chosen was crying and shaking in his boots. He was an enemy, but I couldn’t help but sympathize. Still, I agreed with the idea of using a guide.

“Do you know of the Devil King’s whereabouts? We promise to let you go unharmed if you show us the way. Will you do so?” I offered.

“Y-Yes... H-Happily...”

Benet and I made our way through this complicated castle with a guide in tow. We went through passages, navigated twists and turns, went up and down stairs, through doors, and then more stairs... *Goddamn, isn’t this just way too complicated even for a place like this? What is this, a labyrinth?*

After about ten minutes of walking, Benet had reached the limits of her patience. It was obvious to all that she was unhappy. “Hey, how long until we

get there?”

“R-Right! It’s just up ahead!” The guide said, pointing to where the passage ended.

The end of the passage opened up to a drop with the bottom filled with countless spikes, complete with bones of things that had been caught in its trap scattered about.

“I-It’s made so that you won’t be able to cross unless someone keeps the lever on the right side. I-I’ll stay here and operate the lever for you, so please go on ahead.”

So final bosses in this world like to make attractions like this, huh? What do they think this is, a theme park? Wouldn’t this just make daily life awful? I know the trope though. This is the sort of thing that forces one of the party to leave right before the final battle.

Once the lever was flipped, a bridge came from the other side. *Honestly, we can just jump this gap. But he’s being so nice, so why not just walk it?* Or so I thought, but as soon as we got on the bridge, our guide pushed some sort of button, instantly causing electricity to arc across the bridge.

“H-Hya ha ha ha ha ha! You iiiidiots! You fell for it hook, line, and sinker! You’re taking a billion volts and five hundred thousand amperes! It doesn’t matter how strong you are. You’ll be crispy meat in no time! I did it, Your Majesty! I killed the Conqueror and the Vampire Princess!”

Our guide was laughing uproariously, almost delirious with happiness. But to me, he just seemed sad. Certainly this trap would have worked on any normal person, but unfortunately, we weren’t exactly normal. *A billion volts is like, what, a normal lightning bolt? I mean, that is pretty impressive if you think about it, but... Isn’t this world a place where people can shoot spells left and right that do the same thing? Any fantasy will have the option to shoot lightning, and anyone who eats it’ll just keep going and attack back, you know?* Not to mention this fantasy world had its power balance twisted into knots.

I couldn’t puzzle out why he thought this would beat us. I shrugged, and Benet sighed exasperatedly. Also, the electricity hadn’t stopped yet.

I remained silent a moment longer, then looked to Benet for an opinion. “Or so he says... What do you think?”

“Well, I figured it’d be something like this,” Benet said.

“Wha—?!”

To be fair, I did kind of feel like he was taking us for a ride sometime during our walk. There was no way the path would be that complicated. It was only on the level of vaguely thinking that he was plotting something, but the result was obvious in hindsight. We had been easily caught in the trap.

“You did well up until now. You’re relieved of your duty.”

“Wh-Wha—?! W-Wait a second, please! This was just a sudden impulse! I-I won’t do it anymore! I’ll guide you! I’ll serve you! I’ll even lick your shoes! P-Please...”

That was all he managed to get out. Benet made a forehead-flicking motion without moving from where she was and sent the guide’s head flying. *Ew, gross.*

“So, what now?” I asked. “It’s unlikely that we’ve been going the right way up until now.”

“We might as well keep going for now. If it’s wrong, we can just turn back. By the way, Maphaahl, have you been mapping this place?”

“Yeah, just in case.”

Prompted by Benet, I took a piece of paper out. I’d mapped out our route up until now, just in case. After all, I did have class levels in Ranger. Due to my Ranger skills, the accuracy of my map was unrivaled, and every wall and passage of this castle was rendered perfectly.

However, the map had been ruined.

We both stared at it in silence. Benet, I, and the clothes we wore were not so weak as to be harmed even in the slightest by this electricity, but the paper I’d been using to map with was different. Of course, it couldn’t withstand this current. Yeah, this was a situation where we should be praising the enemy rather than blaming any carelessness on my part. *Oh man, that guide really had a good plan going.* To think he’d manage to ruin my map.

“Now then, let’s get going,” I said.

“Not going to even bother making any excuses?” asked Benet.

“Don’t sweat the small stuff. More importantly, let’s get out of this trap. It’s still only in the single digits, but We are taking damage from this thing.”

“As careless as always...”

Ah— Ah— Can’t hear you—! People grow by making mistakes. We mustn’t get hung up on every little one.

We crossed the bridge and got out of the electric trap. And what was waiting for us was a dead end. It wasn’t surprising, though. We’d already suspected this was the wrong way.

“Oh well. Let’s go back.”

“Why not try just going on a rampage? Then we could make him come to us.”

“Let’s make that a last resort. No harm in searching a little bit more.”

Benet and I continued our conversation as we walked back over the bridge, once again experiencing its shocking charge. *It doesn’t hurt all that much, but I wish it would stop messing with my hair.* I tried to fix my hair by using my hands as a comb as we came upon the last branch before the trap.

As we arrived, we found a devilfolk girl waiting for us with an exasperated expression. She had wavy brown hair, wore plain gray robes, and happened to be a slightly higher level than the other devilfolk. Of course, she was still no match for Benet and I.

She watched us a moment longer, then said, “I’d heard all this already, but you two really are just the most monstrous of monsters, aren’t you? Why are you just walking through that trap like it’s nothing...? You know it has the same strength as a bolt of lightning...”

“Who’re you?”

“I am one of the Seven Luminaries, Saturnus of Earth. I don’t plan to fight you, not that any resistance I could put up would even count as a fight. I was ordered by His Majesty the Devil King to bring you to him.”

Ah, I see. One of the Seven Luminaries. No wonder her level was a bit higher. But her offer to guide us is a saving grace. Let's not look a gift horse in the mouth.

I looked over at Benet, and she also nodded her assent. "That'd be great. We're counting on you."

Saturnus paused. "You're not suspicious? It might be a trap."

"If it is, you'll just die," Benet replied.

I wasn't totally unguarded though. All this time, I'd had the ranger skill, Trap Search, activated at level 1. In return for costing SP to keep activated, which was deducted at steady intervals, this skill would detect traps while it was on, and there were 5 levels to it. Of course, the higher the level of skill you used, the more sensitive the skill would be, and the more hungry for SP the skill would become.

I was using level 1, which would only detect traps which would end in death. Meanwhile, I could feel free to just trip all the other ones. It was doubtful whether a trap existed that could kill me instantly, but theoretically, a trap that would teleport me to the midst of empty space with nothing around would kill me... I think it would, anyway.

However, being hurt was treated much lighter in games, and as long as you didn't actually die, you could just heal through things. That was why I would simply use level 1 of the skill to keep myself from dying, and then just heal-tank through everything else. This was the bread-and-butter dungeon-delving style for high-level players. To be honest, at high levels, it was much faster and more efficient to just trip a trap than to spend time disarming each and every one. The higher the level of the user, the higher the level of the search skill. But at the same time, the higher the level of the user, the more they would want to use the low-level version. The game balance was quite bad.

After some time spent walking in the castle, we eventually came upon an iron door that gave off a stronger feeling of presence than the others. *No, it's not the door... It's who's on the other side.*

"Now, please, go right on through," said Saturnus as she slowly opened the door.

Having been led by the Seven Luminary of Earth, or whatever her title was, we were shown into a large room that seemed like it could fit a hundred people inside. On the other side of the room from the entrance was a throne, which was currently being occupied by the Devil King, still looking the same as ever. He raised his head to look at us as we entered and spoke to Saturnus.

“Well done. Leave us now.”

“Yes, Your Majesty!”

With the order from the Devil King, Saturnus quickly left.

What confidence. He doesn't even want one guard. To be fair though, no guard would make a difference, but given that he's totally fine with facing the two of us at once, he must be quite confident.

The Devil King then looked at us and let out a small laugh as he stood up. Then he picked up a table that was in the corner of the room and carried it over to the center before sitting down.

“You aren't going to use the throne?”

“That's to show my authority for when my subjects come. Of course, I wouldn't normally be sitting in that thing all the time.”

He has a point. But if that was how he thought, then he should have just made a separate audience room and put the throne there. Why is it in his personal room? At any rate, Benet and I sat down at the table facing the Devil King. Sitting with the final boss who's ignoring his throne to sit on a regular chair with us feels incredibly surreal...

“I believe I know why you two have come. You're chasing Dina, no?”

“The fact that you know that name means that you really...”

“Yes, I knew who she was, as well as what she was after.”

He easily admitted to something preposterous, though it was obvious with just a little thought. There was no way the Devil King wouldn't notice all that sneaking around, so the fact that she still received zero punishment or censure

meant that he was, well, an accomplice. Of course, there was the possibility that the Devil King had all the perceptive powers of a deaf bat, but that had now been proven definitely false.

“Hmm, then you know that she is the Goddess’s avatar, don’t you?”

“Indeed.”

“Then you are on the Goddess’s side?”

This world had been subjected to countless repetitions of the same farce of a heroic tale, and the ones to liven it up and make it more exciting had always been this man in front of Pollux and us. Pollux would stand with the hero on the side of justice, while the Devil King would play the role of the villain and fight the hero. In the end, the Devil King would pretend to be defeated while dealing a fatal blow to the hero, and with the hero’s noble sacrifice, the world would be saved. Then, once the villain had been forgotten by all, he would reemerge with a new name and identity to once again threaten the world. *Yep. It’s a farce through and through, a badly written play for children.*

However, one of the actors hated her role from the bottom of her heart and turned against the Goddess. But how did the Devil King feel? Was he still on the Goddess’s side, or did he feel the same as Pollux? I considered this for a moment. *Well, I guess it’s obvious.*

“Do you really believe so?” the Devil King asked.

“No, not at all,” I answered, being honest.

Yes, in my estimation, he’d long since defected against the Goddess. If he hadn’t, then he would never have leaked information to me that was that disadvantageous to the Goddess. What I didn’t understand was why he’d left Dina, who was the Goddess’s avatar, alone. Back then... When he had tried to tell me something, Dina had interrupted us, so Dina should really be on the Goddess’s side, but he’d never stopped her. He had even let her continue to pretend to be Venus after that interruption. That was the part I just didn’t understand. Also, I still had yet to figure out his goal.

“Would you tell us why you betrayed the Goddess?”

“It’s not really all that special a reason. I just got bored of it.” The Devil King

rested his chin in his hand as he chuckled, narrowing his eyes. "I finally got tired of maintaining harmony and pretending to lose every time, even though I had the power to win. Isn't it only natural to want to try controlling the plot yourself? I just prioritized my desire for power and control... That's all."

I paused, incredulous, before asking, "Really?"

"Really. There's no other reason." The Devil King laughed fearlessly as he confessed his ambitions, making him look the very picture of the archenemy of humanity.

I wonder why, but I just don't believe him when he says that's his real goal. In fact, it looked to me like he was purposely playing the fool in order to hide his true intentions. I still can't tell what those "true intentions" are, but he's definitely trying to protect something. That's the feeling I get. Something that he wants to protect... Enough to defy the Goddess and stop this preestablished act of losing over and over... Maybe...

"By the way, that son of yours, Terra, has been raised very well, hasn't he?" I tried asking.

There was no change in his expression. *I guess that wouldn't be enough to shake him up, huh?*

"He's a foolish son unworthy of being a devilfolk, I'm embarrassed to say." He looked directly at me as he spoke, sounding amused. "You look a lot better since the last time I saw you. It seems as if you've regained much more of yourself by now."

"Thanks to you. She also managed to hit some sense into me as well."

"But you aren't fully back yet."

"Correct."

I still recognized myself as me. As long as I could make that distinction, Lufas Maphaahl was not fully back. Up until now, I hadn't been able to exhibit even half the power of Lufas at her best, though that was still enough to kill most enemies. So far, the only people I'm in danger of losing to are Benet, the ouroboroses, the Goddess, and the Devil King right in front of me.

“I’m looking forward to when we’ll inevitably fight.”

“Is there really a need to?”

“Of course there is. I’ll warn you now: don’t think that the enemy of your enemy is your friend in this case. While I have indeed rebelled against the Goddess, I have in no way surrendered to you.” The Devil King paused. “This world doesn’t need two rulers. As those who seek to conquer, the both of us will eventually need to have it out with the world on the line.”

The world, huh? You say that, but you’ve been taking it pretty damn easy with your invasion so far, haven’t you? If he was actually serious about it, he’d have taken much more of the world by now. Actually, depending on the circumstances, he might have already had to fight with Benet and one of them would have been gone by the time I came around. The fact that this hadn’t happened yet meant that he wasn’t serious about conquering the world. There had to be some other goal of his. *It’s almost like dragging this out is his goal...* I thought.

“Then why not settle things here and now? If you want, I can be your opponent instead.” Benet, who had up until now been quiet, suddenly spoke up. When she did, the atmosphere in the room instantly became tense, and the windows in the room suddenly cracked.

The Devil King didn’t react to that, though it was clear he was ramping up for a fight, just like Benet was. Any normal person would’ve found it hard to breathe.

While bathing in this tense atmosphere, the Devil King made an extremely obvious subject change. “Dina left me a message for you.”

I suppose that means he doesn’t want to fight just yet. Honestly, if we were to fight right now, he’d be double-teamed by both Benet and me, so he would have almost no chance to win. His decision to avoid a fight was wise. Benet wouldn’t want a victory due to numbers either, so when the Devil King didn’t respond to her provocation, she stopped her belligerent aura with a bored expression.

“She says: ‘I will be waiting for you in the place we first met, which exists somewhere within your memories.’”

“The place we first met?” I unconsciously repeated the message.

I remembered the first place we met; it was Maphaahl Tower. That was where I first saw Dina, and where everything had begun. But I’d already checked Maphaahl Tower, and Dina hadn’t been there. *So where is she? What place could Dina possibly be referring to?* Unable to figure it out, I ended up sinking into silence.

“We have received the message. Sorry for intruding.”

It seemed that Dina wasn’t here, but we had received a hint. *The place where I first met Dina, someplace I remember...huh?*

I didn’t even know where to begin, but I had time to piece it together. Also, I wouldn’t be able to borrow someone else’s wisdom on this either, since the answer was in my memories and my memories alone.

“Are you leaving?”

“Yeah. From the fact that she left behind a hint, it looks like she’s rather prone to bouts of loneliness,” I said.

This was a message from Dina to me. She was telling me to hurry and find her, even though she was the one who had hidden. *It’s like she’s a child who’s really good at hide and seek but still wants to be found quickly anyway.* When I thought of it like that, the whole thing started to seem really silly for some reason. I was being led around by the nose, but in the end, I couldn’t bring myself to resent her.

“I see. I suppose you’ll have solved everything by the time we next meet.”

“Probably.”

The Devil King laughed challengingly, and I smiled in return. Surely the next time we saw each other, it wouldn’t be this peaceful. The next time we met, it would be as enemies. Both the Devil King and I knew that, but that was exactly why we laughed now.

“Then until next time, Orm.”

“Indeed. Until next time, Lufas.”

I stood up from my seat and Benet followed suit. She seemed quite bored by

now, and the relief that it was finally over was written all over her face. As we made our way towards the exit, the guards seemed completely terrified as they opened up a path for us, and we left through the same door we came in.

“Right then. Do you have any idea where she is?” Benet questioned.

“Let’s go back to Maphaahl Tower for now. Maybe there was something we missed,” I replied, naming a place that we’d already visited once even though I didn’t actually believe she’d be there.

But there was no other place I could think of where I could possibly have met Dina first. The first thing I had seen when arriving in this world was Laevateinn’s throne, but Dina wasn’t there. From there, I’d taken flight for the first time, reached my tower, and met her. *Yeah, no matter how many times I go over it in my head, Maphaahl Tower’s the first place I met her. There’s no place else. I hope there’s at least some sort of hint that we missed there, but...*

I had the *Argo* make for Maphaahl Tower, and we once again reentered humanity’s sphere.

* *

“I bet she’s searching Maphaahl Tower right about now,” Dina muttered, smiling with her blue hair swaying in the wind.

As she walked, the people around her stopped, unable to prevent themselves from turning around and taking a second look. While her good looks definitely played a part, the biggest reason would be the color of her hair. Of the people around her, ninety percent of their hair colors were black. Every once in a while, there was one with dyed brown or blonde hair, but their original color would also be black. There wasn’t a single person with natural blue hair, like Dina. In the first place, blue hair was an impossibility as far as genes were concerned, so given that piece of common knowledge, the fact that she wasn’t cosplaying made her definitively unreal.

Dina simply continued to walk, unconcerned with their stares, as she thought back to events two hundred years ago. *I was still a doll back then. With no sense of self, I seriously believed that I was a temporary body of the Goddess that was left on the earth. To me, “Dina” was just the name given by the parents used to birth me, and my real name was actually Alovenus.*

It was true that she was the Goddess's avatar, and she had retained both the memories and personality of the Goddess. So to her, there was no reason to doubt her memories, and she'd never once thought of herself as herself. However, it had all come crashing down two hundred years ago—201 years ago, to be exact. It had been one year before the betrayal of the Seven Heroes. Back then, Dina had finally awoken her sense of self and was truly born to the world. Now, she was undoubtedly moving under her own will.

She'd purposefully strayed from the Goddess's script, though she took care to do it in small enough ways for the Goddess not to notice. Nobody else knew what her goal was, and who she was doing it all for. Was it for Lufas? For the Goddess? Or possibly for some unknown third party? The answer was a complete mystery.

Self-propelled boxes moved across well-maintained roads, and the sides of the street were crammed tight with stores sporting various signs. There were high-rise buildings so tall it seemed like they stretched up to heaven, and the streets were filled with salarymen going to work and students going to school—Dina was walking through the streets of Japan, and she eventually disappeared into the hustle and bustle of the city.

18

Oh no, what do I do? I can't find any clues.

We once again searched Maphaahl Tower from top to bottom, but it was astounding how little we found. I'd hoped that she might have at least left some sort of small clue, but there was absolutely nothing, and now that we'd finished, I was completely lost. This was definitely the place Dina and I had first met. If there was nothing here, I had no idea where I should look.

"Hey, Maphaahl, do you really have no clue where to look at all?" asked Benet.

"Unfortunately not. What should we do...?"

"Not really sure what's going on, but this Dina person is this Goddess's avatar,

right? Then maybe she used her memory manipulation to implant some sort of information only you could remember inside you? If she didn't, why would she include 'in your memory' in that message?" Benet proposed, but it didn't help in the end.

"You make a good point, but..."

I didn't know what I didn't know. Sure, I had been told it was in my memories, but as far as I remembered, this tower was where I had met Dina. If we went back any further than that, I'd go back to Japan when I had just been "me," back when I had seen Alovenus in the game, and she brought me to this world...

"Ah." I couldn't stop myself from making a noise.

No, wait a second. Wait just a second... Right, this world wasn't the first place I met Dina! It was in the other world...in Japan of Earth, in 'my' room before I became Lufas. It was through my computer screen, when I first placed her as a decoration in Maphaahl Tower! Is that really the answer? Is she seriously on Earth and not Mizgarz? If that really is the case, then no one other than me would ever realize this.

"Never mind, We do have one idea."

"Oh? Where?"

"The other world."

"Huh?"

Benet made a face that said, "The hell is she saying?" But even I wasn't completely sure. Since we couldn't find Dina no matter how hard we searched Maphaahl Tower, that was the only idea I had left. *Yeah, Dina's gotta be on Earth, probably in Japan...in the place I used to live or at least near it. And I have a way to get there.*

I should be able to overcome time and space to get to the other side using Exgate. After all, that was exactly how the kid, Sei, was summoned to this world. The answer was so obvious I should have done it earlier. In order to reconnect with my roots, I should have gone back at least once. The reason I hadn't was probably because I myself rejected the idea. I was probably more afraid of the truth than anyone else.

“There is another planet, another world that is not this one,” I admitted. “Dina is probably there.”

“Another world, huh?” Benet paused. “Hmm, sounds interesting. There might be some people there worth fighting.”

Benet smiled belligerently, so I had to warn her against it. “No, there won’t be. Please just don’t go wild over there.”

I felt sorry for her, but there was definitely nobody on the other side who could come even close to fighting Benet. Earthlings had an incredibly low ceiling for physical prowess because they’d regressed, thanks to the progress of society and the convenience of their daily lives. You hear about it a lot, don’t you? How there’s a huge difference in the endurance and pure strength between modern and ancient humans?

There were now living spaces in which the inhabitants could freely control the temperature inside, not to mention methods of transportation like cars, buses, and trains. And as long as one wasn’t dedicated to playing a sport, it wasn’t uncommon for a person to not leave their house for days at a time. All that was the proof of peace, something that could only be done because they were ahead of Mizgarz. Even America, the greatest of the major powers of the world and possessing the world’s most powerful military, was famous for claiming that pizza was a vegetable dish and creating a nation of obesity.

All that was great, but it of course made for a drastic and unfortunate drop in physical ability. Earthlings couldn’t even be compared with the people of Mizgarz. They were even weak compared to past humans from their own world. *Also, pizza is not a vegetable dish.*

In my estimation—and it was only an estimation—the best fighters from Earth known the world over wouldn’t even be over level 5 in Mizgarz. From what I’d heard, the bones of a person from Earth wouldn’t allow them to lift anything over five hundred kilograms, no matter how strong they were. Compared to that, Mizgarz was completely messed up. As long as your level went up, you could lift anything. I’d never tested myself in full, but I was at least strong enough to throw the Dragon King like a paper ball with a single hand.

I was also worried about the laws of physics there. From what I could tell, the

Goddess must have gotten rid of those laws here, since they weren't doing any work at all. Even if Benet and I were to make a round trip around Mizgarz in less than a second, it would be fine, but if we were to try that on Earth, things would probably end in disaster. In the worst case, we could destroy all life. We wouldn't have to worry too much about fighting on the other side, but if it ever came down to that, we'd have to slow down a lot. Otherwise, things would get really bad.

All this was a long way of saying that if Benet was to go on a rampage over there, the Earth would be in danger. In the worst case, she could bust straight through Earth and endanger the rest of space as well.

"We suppose we should ask: will you be joining us?"

"That's the plan."

"Then please, behave yourself over there. And make sure you never, ever move at the same speed as you would in Mizgarz."

"What do you mean by that?"

I had knowledge of both this world and the other one, so I knew how bad things could turn out if we were to seriously move while on the other side. However, Benet had none of that knowledge, which meant that, to her, common sense said that it didn't matter what speed she moved at. If I didn't correct that assumption first, I'd be far too scared to bring her over.

As an example, I first used the Grappler skill, Shine Blow, in a random direction. This skill was one of my sure-hit skills, and as its name implied, you punched at the speed of light in order to produce a blow that could never be dodged. Also, this "speed of light" was not absolute but relative. For example, if I were to compress my internal time to ten percent of real time before using this skill, it would still be "the speed of light" from my perspective. This meant that it was possible to actually strike far faster than the speed of light.

My attack gouged out a line like it was a shovel, reaching all the way past the horizon, but that was it. The world itself was completely fine.

"Put simply, an attack like this would destroy the world on the other side."

There was a moment of silence before Benet said, "Well, that's only natural if

someone like you were to punch with all their might. You could probably collapse a star.”

“That’s not what We mean. No matter where you aim it, if a person—or rather, a person-sized mass—were to pass the speed of light, it would all be over. The shock wave from the sheer speed would happen just like here, but its scale would be completely different. Even if you just break the sound barrier, it will cause a disaster. In fact, people theorize that it would destroy galaxies, not just planets. Though We are not an expert in that field.”

Benet pondered this silently, only to eventually react with, “Just how fragile can a world get? Wouldn’t it be impossible for a punch that doesn’t even hit to destroy something?” Benet seemed half in disbelief and half in exasperation, but I was sure that we were the strange ones for not understanding.

While we talked, I was once again impressed by how tough Mizgarz was. It was exactly because this world was so messed up that Benet and I could fight at full force. If it weren’t, then we would probably have had to seal our own powers because they’d be too great.

Either way though, it was hard to believe that we would have to fight on the other side at all. In fact, we’d have to be extremely careful not to accidentally kill anybody over there. No joke, we could kill someone just by bumping into their shoulder... To the people on the other side, Benet and I were basically like a certain plumber with a red hat permanently under the effect of an invincibility star...

“And so, you will have to wear these as insurance. We will be doing the same.”

Using Exgate, I retrieved a set of bangles and handed one to Benet while wearing the other one myself. It was a limited item available only to those who’d taken part in the event it was given out during, named “Infinity.” Its effect was to set all SP costs of all skills to 1 when equipped, so while it wasn’t truly infinite, it was a broken item that made skills cost basically nothing to use.

However, the drawback of the item was just as severe. It debuffed all the wearer’s stats down to just ten percent of their original numbers, so it had almost no viability in real combat, and its main use was just to enhance pre-

battle buffs and preparations. Even then, it would still be faster to just use your buffs and skills without bothering with the bangle and recover your SP afterward, so it basically had no use at all.

With this, our stats would at least drop to the mere triple digits, and we'd be somewhat comparable to the Seven Luminaries. Well, we still wouldn't lose to them, even with this thing on, though.

"Oh... We should also match our clothing to the other side."

We looked like cosplayers to the other side the way we were dressed now, so it would probably be best to make new clothes to match their sense of style.

Benet and I returned to the *Argo* to change clothes. It didn't feel nice to lose our equipment effects, but there was no way I could walk around Japan in my dress. Even the clothes I'd gotten from Megrez were fashioned around fantasy aesthetics, and they wouldn't fit in the other world. On that point, the dress shirt and skirt that Benet was wearing might have actually fit in with the other world, but I had her change anyway, just in case.

"Well, this looks about right."

"What a strange design."

While checking my appearance in the mirror, I felt some satisfaction at how much I looked like I would blend in. I was wearing a red hoodie and jeans. Also, my hoodie was the type with pockets. *Don't tell me it's lame. It's got the perfect amount of lame. I like it. Also, it's really nice and easy to move around in.* Though it was more like my usual dress was too hard to move around in. I wore it because the effect was strong and the material was tough, but it was really hard to throw out kicks and the like. I wore my hair in a ponytail and didn't bother with fake glasses. There wouldn't be anyone there who would recognize me, after all.

Benet's look hadn't changed all that much. She wore a white dress shirt and a black skirt with tights underneath. *She'll calmly throw out kicks even with a short skirt... I'm seriously worried.* Benet also had a black long coat to wear on top of her getup.

"Now then, let's go."

I stood on top of the *Argo's* deck, gathering magic in my right hand and divine power in the left. I combined the two together and let them repel each other, using that reaction to tear a hole in space. By doing so, an Exgate large enough to let people pass through appeared before us.

Normally, the other side would lead somewhere on Mizgarz, but this time was different. I bore the hole deeper and deeper, past the world of Mizgarz—no, past the universe itself. I bore a hole through space to escape this world. This Exgate would cross worlds to the other side, where Earth was waiting.

I had no need to calculate coordinates. After all, Mizgarz was also located in the same place relative to Earth in the solar system. We had a sun, a moon, a Mars, and a Mercury, which meant I could use the same coordinates. The place we stood right now in Mizgarz also existed on Earth. Though to be more precise, it was on the flip side. I didn't know which side was the front and which was the back, but in the end, as long as I bored a hole straight through to the other side, we'd be golden. And the reason why I knew all this when I shouldn't was most likely because Dina really had implanted something inside me.

"Let's go, Benet." I held my hand out to Benet, causing her to look puzzled.

Soon enough, she asked, "What's up with the hand?"

"Just take it. Your permission is needed to use the Exgate. If it somehow runs out mid-travel then you'll be stuck in between two worlds. If you refuse now then We will just determine that it will be impossible to take you along and go ourselves."

After a long moment of silence, Benet reluctantly laid her hand on top of mine before looking away.

Do you really hate holding hands with me that much? Well, there's no point in asking about it now. She's always been an enemy to me, so this is probably on the amazingly sweet side actually.

With the crew of the *Argo's* wishes of "good luck" and "be careful" pushing us along, Benet and I jumped through the Exgate, hand in hand, and pierced further and further through the veil.

Further and deeper we went, farther than any normal movement would ever

get you. By passing through a boundary and a space that physical movement would not be able to replicate, I was able to feel the magic and divine power that this world was filled with more strongly than any time before. This space, which probably had nothing in it originally, had most likely been filled with magic to create matter before being supplemented with divine power to lock it into permanence. It was a truly godlike ability produced by a melding of magic and divine power that we could never imitate.

I see. So in the end, magic and divine power are basically the same thing. It's just the power of creation separated into what amounts to different polarities. All this time, people have been told that magic is the power to create something from nothing whereas divine power is the power to reinforce what already exists, but that's not the truth. Magic is the power to birth something into existence, and divine power is the ability to reinforce that into permanence. Mizgarz is made of these two powers. That's why it's possible to break open the stuff this Mizgarz is made of and create a hole by combining magic and divine power together.

It was kind of like overwriting saved data. By creating a similar piece of data to what was already there, it was possible to overwrite what was there previously. Through that overwriting, the old data was destroyed by the new data. Of course, the new data would settle in almost immediately, but for just a moment, there would be a space with nothing there. So in essence, the Exgate technique was the process of overwriting a part of the world to create a hole of nothing in which to pass through while the overwriting was happening. This meant that the world we lived in—rather, this entire universe we lived in—was Alovenus's magic.

What I didn't understand was why the beings living in this world weren't also made of magic. Though this world was entirely made of magic, the people living in it were not. Their births had nothing to do with magic. After all, if that were the case, I would have disappeared long ago. Though I'd changed somewhat due to all the mana in me, I was still different from the devilfolk.

In other words, Alovenus had made the universe by combining magic and divine power before going through all the trouble of bringing in living things from elsewhere. And if I were to speculate further, those living things were

most likely from Earth. That was why this place resembled Earth so closely.

But why? Why bring over life from another place rather than just make it, if you're powerful enough to create an entire universe? Was it because she was only able to create incomplete life forms, like the devilfolk?

I was quiet for a long moment as I mulled this over.

"What's wrong, Maphaahl?" asked Benet.

"Nothing."

I was coming upon a truly frightening possibility, one that I desperately wished wasn't true. But those were the exact types of things that ended up being right on the money, so I had an uncomfortable sort of certainty inside me.

Alovenus... Maybe she's not the actual god of creation. Maybe she's actually the exact opposite... With that thought, I started having cold sweats.

19

"Looks like this is the end. So We were a little too late in noticing..." a lone girl muttered to herself in the throne room at the top of Maphaahl Tower after a long silence.

Her eyes were dull, and there was no sign of the bright girl she had been in the past when she'd traveled the world as an adventurer. She'd killed her enemies—killed and killed and killed again—believing that by doing so, peace would finally come one day. She had done anything for that ideal, and she was already used to committing deeds that others would call her a demon or a brute for.

But it seems that I have ignored my friends far too much. I was so concentrated on looking forward that I never noticed the discontent of those who followed after me. The goddess took advantage of that, and now they're filled with so much hatred it's irreversible. The only one who hasn't changed is the Vampire Princess. I honestly respect her for that steel will, but it seems the other six weren't nearly as strong as her. Failing to notice that was my mistake.

This was the result of failing to think and consider things properly under the excuse of trust. My friends' eyes are now clouded with hatred, and they can no longer be reasoned with.

They were still pretending to follow her, at least, but she knew that they were planning and preparing to rebel behind the scenes. She also knew that half of her army agreed with them and were prepared to raise the flag of rebellion.

“It’s not over yet. I know you’d be able to beat all of them and start over.”

“Yeah, you’re probably right. But you know, Ophiuchus, would anyone actually be willing to follow a ruler who has killed all her friends and comrades? A lord who kills over half her friends and subjects is nothing but a tyrant. No one would bend the knee. Also, if We were to claim victory by killing all our friends and followers, We would have nothing left.” She quieted, then said, “Whether We win or lose, We lose everything. It was our loss as soon as it got to this point.”

The black-winged ruler laughed in self-deprecation. Her own incompetence was laughable. Once, she’d seriously thought that she would be willing to take on the role of the evil king in order to bring about world peace. She had been willing to be a fearsome killer to her enemies, but that had just inspired fear in her own friends, and as soon as a ruler was told they weren’t worthy, they weren’t a ruler anymore. They were just a fool with a big attitude deluding themselves.

“At the very least, you have the Twelve Stars. And me.”

“You’re right. We suppose that’s our only saving grace.” The black-winged ruler chuckled while feeling the utmost gratitude that, even in this situation, she had precious followers who would be with her to the end. And that was exactly why she felt that the battle that was coming should not happen.

If she was serious, it was possible for her to win. If she wanted to, she could crush all of them under her own power and do with their lives as she saw fit. But those heroes with the backing of the Goddess wouldn’t fall so easily. It would be great if she could use Pressure to simply make everything go her way, but they would surely have a counterplan for it. Some skills or other methods of counteracting the Pressure skill did exist. It was in no way a perfect skill.

Even if the heroes were to come at her with the Goddess's protection, she wouldn't be defeated. But there would definitely be casualties among the Twelve Stars. In order to prevent that from happening, the best option was to leave the stage herself. *Things would also be settled if We were to simply kill Alioth and everyone else before any of the Twelve Stars were to fall, but We don't think We'll be able to do that. If We could, then We would already be an empty shell with no emotions left.*

The ruler paused before admitting, "There's no other choice than to decide on a 'way to lose.'"

"A...way to lose?"

"Indeed. If they all want us to abdicate the throne so badly, then why not give them their wish? And with that deception, We can use this opportunity to find who brought this situation to bear."

"But..."

"It will be a hard road for you. If you want to leave our side, now is the time."

The ruler had no intention of rebuking her, even if she left. But even in the face of that offer, the girl named Ophiuchus smiled courageously.

"I will not, Miss Lufas. I will never return to being a puppet. I was just a puppet with no will of her own until I met you... You gave me my own self, so for you, I'll deceive even the Goddess," the girl with blue hair said, pledging her loyalty.

* *

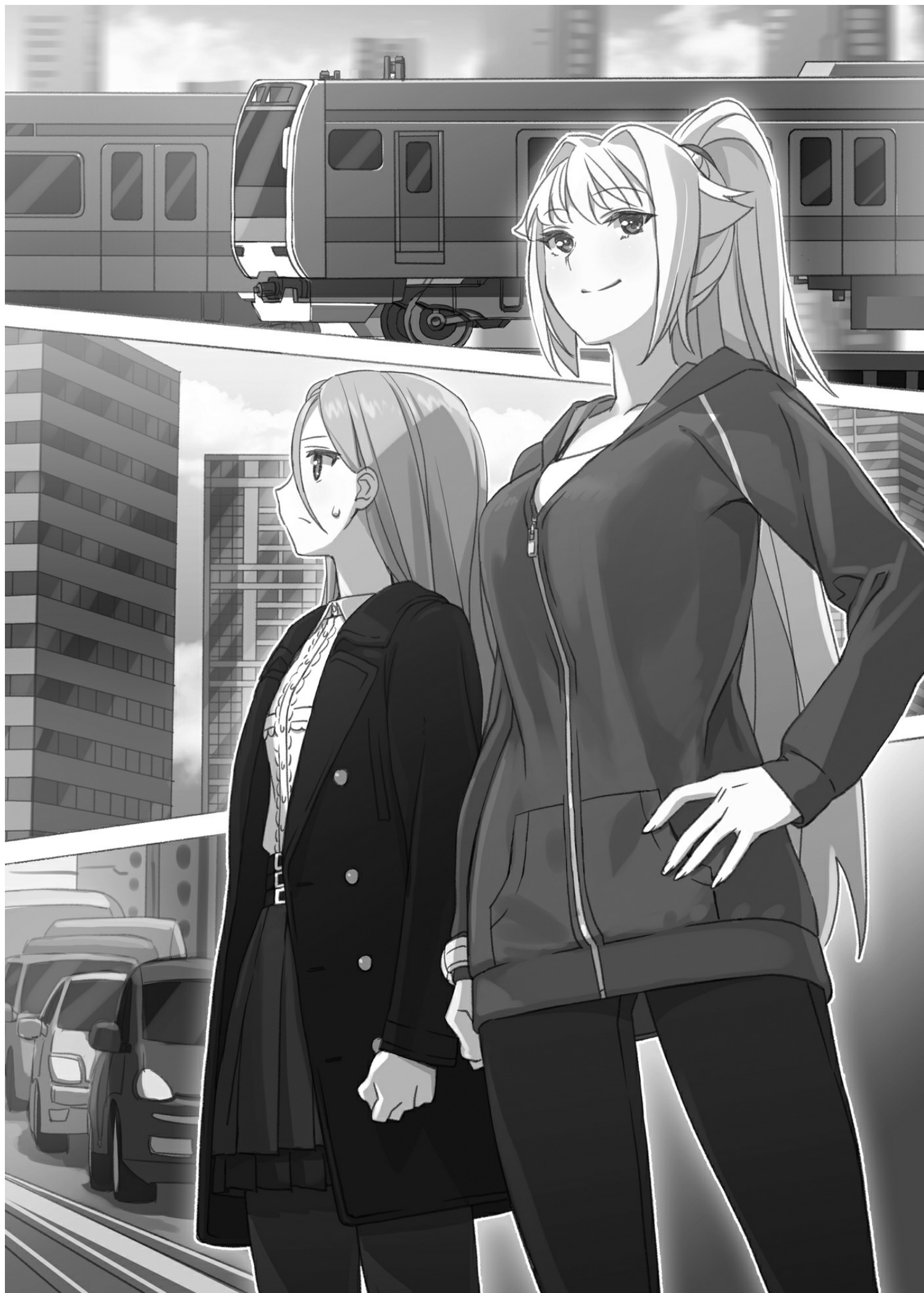
The moment we crossed boundaries into the other world, a strange memory passed through my mind. *That was me speaking just now...but to whom?* Her face was indistinct, as if I was dreaming, and I couldn't discern the girl's identity. But her blue hair resembled the girl we were now chasing.

At any rate, it looked like we had succeeded in crossing worlds. I could no longer feel magic or divine power. We were in an utterly realistic world in which the laws of physics and science were in full control. However, it was far more advanced than the fantastic world of Mizgarz, and many high-rise buildings were lined up, surrounding us. In a sense, it was far more dreamlike than

Mizgarz. We were on Earth. Benet and I had descended upon Japan.

“So this is the other world,” Benet muttered after a moment of quiet as she looked at our surroundings.

Of course, this would be her first time seeing this sight, and it seemed even she was astonished. Metal boxes zoomed down streets, and almost every building towered high into the sky. Children played in parks with no fear of any monsters, and the air was rather filthy.



It was strange. Mizgarz, which had convenient powers like magic and alchemy going for it, was stuck in the comparative Middle Ages compared to Earth, which was so much more advanced, even when it couldn't rely on those powers.

The people walking along the street stopped to turn around and stare at us, and I could hear them whispering about something. *I suppose this hair color does stand out. Well, we do also look nothing like Japanese people. Whatever. For now, let's just figure out where we are. If we just wander around randomly, I'm sure we'll find some sort of sign or something to orient around sooner or later. I can just figure things out then. There's also the local police... Hmm... If it weren't for this speech style I'm stuck with, I could have considered them too...*

There was no way a blonde girl using the royal "we" in this day and age on Earth wouldn't be considered suspicious. Not to mention, neither of us had any ID. In the worst case, we could be arrested for being illegal aliens. As expected, we should probably avoid the police.

"Let's just keep walking along this path for now. We should find a sign or something soon."

"Not sure what you're talking about, but sure."

As we walked, I picked up a random rock and tried crushing it in my hands. *There's no change to my grip strength. Looks like my physical abilities are still the same, even in this world.* I had wondered whether or not the differences between worlds would affect our physical abilities, but apparently, I had been worried for nothing. This meant that I could still run faster than sound and punch faster than light in this world. I could probably even reach the moon in a single leap.

However, if I were to do any of that in this world, then I would be the cause of unimaginable casualties on Earth, so it was something that should never be done. My bangle was doing work at least, but even then, if I were to run at full speed, it would be rather easy to destroy an entire city. *I'm going to have to be careful.*

Just as that thought ran through my mind, Benet ignored a signal and was about to cross a street. Of course, the driver of the incoming truck lay on the

horn as hard as he could, but even then, Benet showed no reaction. In fact, I could see her making a fist...

“Stop that!”

Reacting in time, I grabbed Benet by the nape and pulled her back. I made sure to hold back my speed a lot, so there wasn't any damage to the surroundings, but even with all that, several students who happened to be nearby were shocked at what they had seen.

“Hey, did you just see that, or was I just seeing things?”

“N-No, I saw it too. That blonde foreigner, she was super fast...”

“Wait, isn't she, like, impossibly hot? Is she an idol?”

Apparently, even that speed was too much. *Whatever. Should still be fine to leave them alone.* With just that many witnesses, it would, at most, blow up into a mysterious event. If they went as far as to talk about it on the internet, it might turn into a meme or something, but nobody would actually believe it.

With Benet still in hand, I left the area.

“What do you think you're doing?”

“That's our line. What were you doing?”

“That golem thing was shouting while charging at me, so I was about to teach it a lesson.”

“That's not a golem. It's a vehicle. And the signal light was red, so you're in the wrong for trying to cross. There are strict laws in this world about whether or not the road belongs to people or vehicles.”

“Sig...nal?”

“That thing. The one with three differently colored lights.”

After that, I gave Benet a detailed explanation of traffic lights, cars, and roads, but it was doubtful she understood even half of it. Even while I was explaining it, I called one of the lights blue, and she argued that it was green. I had no response to that. At any rate, now I understood that I couldn't let Benet out of my sight. She was seriously capable of anything.

After a while of walking, we found something to orient ourselves around, as expected. *So we're in...Tokyo, huh? I lived in Niigata, so we're actually unexpectedly close. It should be just a little north of Tokyo... So we can just head in that general direction.*

However, our method of transport would be a problem. We had none of this world's money. We did have gems and gold and the like, so it was possible to exchange things for money, but if I remembered correctly, that sort of thing needed proper ID.

What to do... Maybe we should just jump from building to building? We probably won't be seen that much if we do that. Even then, we should still get some money just in case though. I want to bring back food from this world too, after all. I paused as I ran over our options internally. *I guess I should use that shit skill for once.*

I was referring to the skill “Money Getter.” It was a Ranger skill that allowed the user to find and gather money during battle. It was a useless skill. Any money gained through this skill would just be a drop in the bucket, and on top of that, you'd have to leave yourself defenseless during battle, so you'd just get hit and have the skill interrupted anyway. Of course, if the skill were to be interrupted, you'd lose all the money you would have gathered. It was absolutely useless unless you seriously had absolutely no money whatsoever, and even then, you could just sell something you had on hand to better effect, so in the end, it really had no use.

I had tried using it a couple of times right after I'd gotten it, but it was so useless I immediately gave up on it. Whenever the subject of useless skills was brought up on the message boards, this skill would always be brought up. But it seemed even this skill had a niche, and that was when you were completely penniless on the streets with no ID.

I lifted up a five-hundred-yen coin off the ground using telekinesis and caught it in my hand. It could be considered stealing, but I didn't pay that any mind. With amounts this small, no one would bother reporting it stolen anyway. Of course, this also meant that five hundred yen would be used up quickly, so there was a need to multiply it.

Luckily, there was a slot machine place nearby. To be honest, I wasn't very familiar with them, but things should work out anyway. It was time for my luck value of 9280 to finally show its worth, given how useless it was normally.

I temporarily removed my bangle and entered the establishment. Benet's face scrunched in as soon as she experienced the noise and general dirty atmosphere, but at least it didn't seem like she'd go on a rampage anytime soon. Well, it was only about the same level of noise as gambling dens in Mizgarz though.

In the end, I won buckets. Midway through, I shared my coins with Benet, and we both took advantage of our luck stats to make a killing. It was remarkable how Benet responded to the anime characters on the machines, making remarks over every little thing like, "Aren't her eyes too big?" and, "Why is her face so wide?"

We'd managed to work up over one hundred thousand yen for the moment, which was enough to go shopping without too much worry in this world.

I put the bangle back on, and just as we left the slots place, there was a scream. Turning around, I saw a small child about to run right into a truck at an intersection a little ways away. The crossing signal was green, which meant the truck was the one ignoring the light. *Yep, the trope of tropes*, I thought.

I lightly kicked off the ground, jumping into the intersection in time to punch away the truck that was closing in on the child. Well, rather than punched away, it was more like I made it float in the air a little. There was no way I would do something like blowing it far away to cause even more trouble for people. The truck, which spent a couple seconds in the air, landed safely, and while the driver inside had fainted he was safe.

He's got a smartphone in his hand... That's dangerous. Pay attention when you're driving, dipshit. Maybe I should have punched a little harder.

When I looked around, I noticed that there was already a gagging audience forming. There were even people pointing their smartphones at me. *Oh crap, I went too far.*

I left the place slowly, making sure not to break the sound barrier—though, to them, it had probably seemed like I had gone supersonic—making sure to take

Benet with me as I leapt away.

“Hey, weren’t we supposed to lay low?” she asked.

“Sorry.”

I continued making my getaway by jumping from building to building, though it was more like I was just straight running away than making a smooth escape...

20

That day there was a fairly exciting event in a certain area, a so-called beauty contest held on a street corner, and anyone was allowed to walk in off the street and participate. Though it was really just a segment for an unpopular late-night variety show, and in a sense, this kind of thing was rare, since it was predestined to fail. It was called a beauty contest, but the main point was probably more to watch and laugh at those who jumped in off the street with too much confidence in themselves.

Of course, there was also another aim. Douse Urena (age eighteen), an idol on the decline, would “coincidentally” pass by and decide to participate, thereby using all the riffraff who had decided to participate as a stepping stone to victory. This was the rather tasteless “big surprise” they’d prepared for this, and of course, there was no coincidence involved; she would have been waiting backstage the entire time. In other words, her victory had been arranged beforehand as a way to attempt to regain her popularity, a last-ditch effort planned by her manager and the TV station, though the show this would take place on wasn’t popular enough to really help that in the first place.

Of course, there would be many paid audience members hidden among the onlookers, perfectly ready to fire up the rest of the audience. In this age, with the popularity of the internet, they were barreling straight towards the ending where this obvious charade was seen through immediately and spread throughout the internet, causing the entire show and everyone related to be flamed to oblivion. The idol’s manager knew this perfectly well, though, and

had pushed forward with it anyway. After all, if they didn't start selling, the idol would disappear anyway, so there was no leeway to allow morals to have a say in things.

Rather, given the current situation, there might not even be any flaming, since, as mentioned before, the program itself was also unpopular. It was more likely that no one would watch it, and while their deception wouldn't be caught, it also wouldn't bear fruit and the girl would just fade into obscurity. In fact, stirring anger on the internet might be a preferable alternative.

"The next contestant is... Oh, could it be?! An idol, of all things, has appeared!"

Finally, it was time for Urena's appearance, and the audience's expectations started to rise somewhat. The fact that it was only "somewhat" was the rather sad reality of an idol who was falling out of favor. Even the emcee seemed a little lacking in enthusiasm, not to mention the fact that several people had started to cop on to what was going on and were looking up at the stage with cold eyes. But at that moment, everyone's gazes were stolen from the stage.

"Hey, stop that, Benet! They're holding an event there. Don't just barge in!"

"As if I care."

A pair of such otherworldly beauties that it was hard to believe they were actually human, one a girl and one a woman, just happened to be passing by the stage. The girl in front's hair was a pale silver color, while the one behind hurriedly chasing after the girl had golden hair, and their looks were utterly unreal. The moderator of the event was utterly dumbfounded, so enraptured by them that he had entirely forgotten to keep emceeing.

This was quite unfortunate for the pitiable idol who was just about to take the stage. Thanks to the two unplanned randoms who had walked by, she was completely overshadowed, and while she was supposed to use the other contestants as stepping stones, she was now the stepping stone herself. Later, one of the contestants would post pictures of them on an online thread about how two way-too-beautiful women passed by an "idol" event, and now she couldn't sleep, causing a small ruckus over the internet as the pictures spread. But the two of them didn't know that. On top of that, there were responses

along with picture proof, claiming things like, “I saw that blonde punch a truck,” and, “They were jumping across buildings,” causing the frenzy to reach a fever pitch. But as always, the two involved remained blissfully unaware.

* *

“Two double cheeseburger combos. And let’s get some soft serve too.”

At the moment, Benet and I had stopped by a famous burger fast-food joint with branches all over the country during our journey to Niigata in order to get a light lunch. An onlooker might ask, “Why burgers?” The answer would be because I missed the taste of junk food.

After receiving the food from the employee at the register, I brought it all back to Benet, who was waiting for me at our table.

“The food from this world is so salty. And the flavoring is very crude,” she said.

“That’s because it’s junk food.”

Benet gave a harsh review as she bit into the double cheeseburger, but she didn’t stop eating, so it seemed that it at least didn’t offend her sensibilities. Personally, I was looking forward to the usual reaction from light novels, where she would say something like, “So this is food from the other world? I-It’s amazing!” But, well, she was the ruler of a country... She was probably used to eating high-quality food. What was it called, food porn? The kings and gods in those series would always give a huge overreaction to the simplest food, but it seemed that Benet had no intention of following those tropes.

But while Benet didn’t seem much interested in the cheeseburger, her expression instantly lit up when she tasted the soft serve, and she wolfed it all down in one go. *Ah, I see. So that’s what surprises her.* The other side certainly didn’t have anything like soft serve. Ice cream did exist, but the best you’d get were just simple sherberts. You would just cover some snow or crushed ice with fruit juice or honey and eat that, and I recall hearing that similar dishes had existed for a long time on Earth. The history of ice cream was surprisingly long.

After that, I bought Benet another five servings of the ice cream as she desired, and with our bellies filled for the moment, we resumed our travels. To

be honest, it would be faster if we could just run towards our destination, but one of the pleasures of a trip was enjoying the road to your destination as well. This time we went down to the subway to ride a bullet train. Once we got on, we sat in some random empty seats. As the bullet train set off, the view out the window started to pass behind us faster and faster, and Benet stared at the scenery, seemingly enraptured.

“This is pretty fast. So this isn’t a golem?”

“No, it’s not.”

“How strange. It doesn’t use mana, and it doesn’t have any sort of decision-making ability, like you would see on a golem. However, it is golem-like, which means this lump of metal is just a lump of metal, but it’s still moving... This seems much more like magic to me.”

Meanwhile, I was reading some random book I’d chosen and bought at a store in the station. Benet couldn’t read the language here, but she was interested in manga, so she was flipping through the pages of one as well.

By the way, I was reading a light novel, and it was about a normal young man who was suddenly summoned to another world. It was a tale of his unparalleled strength and carefree travels, something rather common for the genre. This series in particular had been popular in the past and had been turned into an anime, and the volume I was reading now had been marked “new” in the store, so I bought it. I’d assumed a sequel had come out while I was playing Lufas in the other world, but...

This is strange. I swear I’ve read this before. I remember this series was completed in 2022, so volume 2, which I just bought, shouldn’t be new at all. And this one still has all the typos that were corrected in later printings. It seemed like I’d stumbled on quite the bookstore. I had no idea what kind of nerves the store owner was made of if he was selling a book from a completed series and pretending it was new.

Benet couldn’t read, so she was just looking at the pictures of her manga, but the one she was reading was even older. It was from a famous series of the Showa era. It had an incredible ending where the heroine went berserk and was massacred by the people of her neighborhood, causing the protagonist to turn

his back on humanity, ultimately leading to its destruction and the protagonist's death.

We stepped off the bullet train, and I relied on my memories to retrace my steps back to my home. For some reason, some places here and there were different from what I remembered, but I was right about the road itself. *At least, it should be. As I thought, it's somehow different from what I remember.*

There were none of the more recently opened shops. Instead, I was seeing stores that closed their doors long before. Not to mention, they looked much cleaner than what was in my memory. *The structures in this park should have been removed because they were dangerously full of rust.* I hadn't taken a wrong turn anywhere. We were definitely going the right way. We should have been, anyway. But...

In the spot where my house should have been was just an old decrepit single story building. Of course, it wasn't the house I was familiar with.

"This rundown place was our destination?"

"No... But it should be the right location..."

Oh crap. I have no idea what to do next, now that we've gotten this far. There was no way my PC would be in a house I didn't recognize owned by people I didn't know, so the place I'd thought fit the clue wasn't here. But as I was thinking, I heard footsteps behind me, which eventually turned into a familiar voice.

"Yes, you are right. About the location, at least."

I paused. *I see, looks like I was right, at least.*

I turned around to see Dina, completely unchanged from how I had last seen her. *You really chose an annoying place to hide, didn't you? Thanks to you, we wasted a lot of time trying to find you.*

Dina gave a small smile before coming to stand beside me. Meanwhile, Benet made no move at all, preferring to get a better read on the situation first.

"This is an abandoned house," Dina explained. "Half a year from now, it'll be taken down so that in another half a year—in 2017—a house you will be very

familiar with will be built.”

“2017? Then it’s...” I trailed off.

“Yes. It’s 2016 right now. One year from now, a couple and their child will buy a new home built here to live in. And that child... Rather, that ‘man’ will grow with no knowledge of who he is until the age of twenty-one. And in the year 2033, he will be led to Mizgarz by the Goddess—or rather, me—along with his memories and personality. That man is beside me right now.”

Benet’s look sharpened a little, glaring at us after hearing what Dina had to say, but Dina just remained smiling. I, too, felt strangely satisfied by that explanation.

I see, was all I thought. No wonder I don’t feel any nostalgia for this world. So, all this means is that in the end “I” was always Lufas Maphaahl, just with more memories layered on top.

There had never been two personalities inside of me. I had just lost sight of myself, so I’d convinced myself and everyone else I was someone different. The “stranger playing at being Lufas” was, in fact, just Lufas.

“So who was that young man exactly?”

“He is also you, Miss Lufas. I suppose it would be more accurate to say that he would be close to Pollux and I.”

“Mmhmm...”

Every time Dina spoke, it felt like another puzzle piece was falling into place inside my head. *Yes, “I” was always just me—just an avatar.*

Avatars could be largely divided into three categories: those made from magic, those made with divine power, and those actually birthed by borrowing a real human womb. Lufas was... *No, let’s stop talking like I’m someone else.* I was the third kind of avatar. I imitated the Goddess’s specialty and created my own avatar in a different world in a different time. The memories and personality entrusted to that avatar had been returned to my original body by Dina, thus giving me access to an objective perspective I hadn’t had before and allowing me to reflect on myself.

Now I understood something, something that only a person who had reflected on their own past from the perspective of someone else could understand. I understood that my fall had been inevitable. Just being able to think that was worth having another personality planted on top of mine.

“By the way, how is he doing?” I asked.

“He’s fine. I copied his memories and personality, but after the ‘incident,’ he’s been living just fine. He’ll probably manage to reach a ripe old age all without ever realizing what he is,” said Dina.

“Is that so? Good, then.”

“By the way, he lives dependent on his parents until he’s twenty-three before getting a job at a company and finally becoming independent.”

“You didn’t really have to tell me that.”

That’s a load off my back. At least I haven’t stolen anyone’s lives from them.

At first, I had thought I’d stolen Lufas’s life by possessing her, then I thought I’d stolen this boy’s life. But I am Lufas, so there was nothing to take there, and the man I had been was still doing just fine and would even become independent. With this, I could breathe easy and move on.

“By the way, would you tell me why you had to do this in such a roundabout way?”

“Of course. There’s no reason to hide it. Before that though, let me once again introduce myself,” Dina said, producing a business card from a chest pocket and handing it to me. After seeing the name written on it, I once again felt a piece falling into place.

Ahh, I see. You really were exactly who I thought you were.

“I have three names. One: Dina, the Goddess’s avatar. Two: Venus of the devilfolk’s Seven Luminaries. And one more...” She giggled, causing Benet to cross her arms in displeasure.

Yes, she’d been deceiving everybody. Like a true snake, she had deceived me, the Twelve Stars, the devilfolk, and even the Goddess. She was the “thirteenth.”

“I am one of the Conquering Thirteen Heavenly Stars: Ophiuchus the Snake

Charmer. That is the name you gave me.”

21

Dina was the Goddess’s avatar, born to an elven father and a human mother. She didn’t even know how many had come before her. It was most likely that, just like how Dina had been born, the Goddess had borrowed human wombs to create avatars many times before, only to replace them once they had died.

To Dina, all her predecessors were basically also her, not to mention the Goddess. After all, she was basically an offshoot of the Goddess, so they were all one. Her parents had given her the name Dina, but to her, that was just the designation of this new body, not something that was especially important to her. So, she didn’t feel especially grateful or happy about her parents’ love, and once she’d grown, she left home without saying anything while feeling no guilt at all. After all, she was a part of the Goddess. She had no real parents.

Having left her home, Dina started acting as the Goddess’s agent in the world, traveling all over while sometimes judging people and sometimes blessing them. That was when she learned about Lufas Maphaahl, who’d recently started to rise. Even though she was just an adventurer, she’d managed to create several heroic tales that weren’t in the Goddess’s Scenario. She’d saved several countries and had even counted several big names among the monsters she’d defeated, such as the Dragon King Ladon.

She might be a threat... Having identified Lufas as a source of danger, Dina used the founding of Lufas’s country to infiltrate, making sure to leave no trace of herself by manipulating people’s thoughts. Even in the thousands to one chance that someone were to bump into Dina and notice her, she could just create the memory inside of them that she was an advisor. By blending into Maphaahl Tower like a background object, she was able to observe Lufas Maphaahl in what was an extremely bold move.

After observing Lufas, Dina eventually came to one conclusion: Lufas was extremely dangerous. Too dangerous. If she were to be left to her own devices,

she threatened to overturn the Goddess's Scenario from its roots. That was why Dina immediately thought of eliminating the threat, but the more she observed Lufas, the more she realized that would be impossible.

As an offshoot of the Goddess, Dina was level 1000. She also had access to a variety of powers as the Goddess's agent. But even with all that, Dina couldn't even imagine defeating Lufas Maphaahl. Neither thought manipulation, nor recognition blocking, nor magic, nor heaven-arts, nor powers that transcended time, nor even the ability to simply delete her opponents seemed like they would work.

As the Goddess's agent in this world, Dina should have had unbeatable, absolute power. Though her pure combat ability would be lacking somewhat compared to Alioth and Megrez and the like, she had enough unfair powers to be able to defeat all of them unconditionally, at the very least. However, all her powers still obeyed the Goddess's rules and were only unbeatable within those rules. Lufas, who was ignoring all those rules, would not find her power nearly as unbeatable.

Should the "dragons" be awakened...? But they're... Dina had her greatest unique skill as a last resort. Its name was "Raselhague," and its effect was to awaken the ouroboroses all at once.

Yes. She, as the Goddess's agent, had the power to awaken the ouroboroses and give them orders. But using the skill would also mean the destruction of Mizgarz, which was something that could not be undone. If the ouroboroses were to make a move, they would deal fatal damage to Mizgarz. That was why awakening them was truly the last resort for the Goddess. If possible, she didn't want to do it, not if there were any alternatives.

Dina did have several other powerful, unique skills appropriate for her station as the Goddess's agent. She had a total of seven such skills, and their effects and numbers were utterly unfair.

The unique skill Cebalrai was able to manipulate a target's memories, implanting false ones within them. Dina could also use this skill to alter their recognition of her so that they thought of her as nothing more than air or a random rock, thus making her seem as if she had no presence at all.

The unique skill Muliphen was able to affect a target's damage ceiling. It was a powerful debuff that lowered the maximum damage they were allowed to do to a mere 9999.

The unique skill Yed Prior was able to separate a target in time from its surroundings, forcing it to infinitely accelerate. Anybody affected by this skill would eventually accelerate past the concept of time, making it possible to overcome time itself.

The unique skill Yed Posterior did the exact opposite of Yed Prior, separating a target from time to infinitely decelerate it. Anybody affected by this skill would decelerate past just stopping in time, eventually turning into a negative vector, resulting in the target becoming deleted before they were ever born. In other words, it was a powerful instant-death skill.

The unique skill Sabik was a skill to create new skills. There were some restrictions, but it was possible to simply create a new skill to fit any situation. It was so unfair, it made other unfair skills look balanced.

The unique skill Marfik was a forbidden ability that had the Goddess herself possess Dina's body to dramatically raise her combat ability.

Each one of those abilities alone was worthy of being called balance breaking; any one of them could completely overturn a fight. They were the dictionary definition of unfair. But even with all of them, Dina didn't feel like she could best Lufas. She had the feeling that she would be defeated before being able to pull off any of those skills. In fact, she was sure that was what would happen. Lufas could easily tear through the maximum damage wall, escape any jail of time, repel any new skill, and could probably even defeat the Goddess in Dina's body. She could see no way to win.

It happened one day while she was worrying over what to do. Lufas had met with Megrez in order to discuss future steps, and something she'd said gave Dina pause.

"An epidemic in an elven village to the east? We might need to do something about that."

Dina only wavered a small bit; not even she herself knew why. It was such a small reaction, but in that moment, Lufas locked eyes with her. *She's looking at*

me...? No, that's impossible. My recognition blocking should be perfect. Even on the off chance that she were to "see" me, she should just think that I'm an advisor and forget me right away.

"Is something wrong, Lufas?" Megrez asked.

Lufas quickly took her gaze off of Dina, pausing for a moment before saying, "No, it's nothing. Let's stop here for today. Go back first. We'll catch up soon."

"Sure, got it."

After bidding Megrez to leave, Lufas closed the door. Then, she once again turned to Dina and spoke, "How long have you been there?"

Dina was shocked.

She found me! Dina's heart rate spiked once she realized that. *No way. That's impossible! This can't be happening, no!*

Her emotional state caused her to freeze, further exposing weakness and taking away her chance to escape. By the time she'd noticed, Lufas had already come right up to Dina and put her hands up on the wall beside the blue-haired girl to block her escape.

Lufas then looked deep into Dina's eyes. "You don't seem like one of the devilfolk. Just who are you?"

"I-I'm..."

Dina was lost for words, as in that moment, the image of her parents flashed across the back of her mind. They were the people who loved her as Dina, as an individual, not as the Goddess's offshoot.

Why? Why am I thinking of them now? I tossed them aside. I should have thrown them away, since they're just the parents of my current physical body named Dina.

Am I afraid of death? Am I really scared that I'll never be able to meet them again? Dina considered the possibility. *Impossible. Death is not something to be afraid of. After all, I am part of the Goddess. Even if I die here, I will just be born again. Being killed only means the loss of one avatar. It does not mean actual death.*

Dina talked herself down before managing to paste a fake-looking smile on. After a pause, she said, “Nice to meet you, Lufas Maphaahl. My name is Alovenus. The Goddess of creation, Alovenus. Though, this body is only my avatar.”

“Oh?”

“Well done noticing my presence. I should have hidden myself quite well.”

With a mask of a smile, Dina pretended as if she was not worried at all. *Kill me if you want. I’ll just be born into another avatar and move from there.*

But Lufas didn’t make a move. She simply stared at Dina interestedly.

“We just noticed you a moment ago. It was only by a small amount, but your emotions wavered, which weakened your concealment.” Lufas paused. “Are you somehow related to this elven village?”

“No, not at all.”

“Really now? That seems rather hard to believe, given that you’re a half-elf,” Lufas said as she touched Dina’s ear.

Dina flinched, her shoulders jumping upwards for a moment at the sudden sensation.

“You look like a human at first glance. It’s impossible to tell without touching them, but your ears are pointed towards the end. The strength of your cartilage is different too. Elves need stronger cartilage to support their long, pointed ears. It seems half-elves inherit this too. Also, elves have much more sensitive ears, thanks to the presence of more nerve endings.”

“Y-You’re quite knowledgeable.”

“I know an elf, after all. We realized that fact about the cartilage after playing with his ears so much. They were interesting. Who wouldn’t do that?”

Lufas released Dina’s ear but still didn’t move from her spot. It seemed like she had no intention of allowing Dina to leave even though it was clear the girl was looking for an opening and unable to find one.

“What shook you was probably the epidemic... Do you know anybody from that village?”

Dina remained silent for a long moment.

“Should We just guess? Most likely, it would be one, or maybe even both, your parents?”

Lufas’s accurate guess shook Dina, who tried as best she could not to let any emotion show on her face, but even then, she couldn’t stop herself from reacting just a little to Lufas’s guess.

Lufas’s sharp eyes didn’t let Dina’s reaction go either, and seeing that made her sure that she was correct. “That expression. You’re probably thinking, ‘Why?’ Well, it’s not especially complicated. You just said you were an avatar, no? But you aren’t made of magic or divine power, which means you should have parents somewhere. With that knowledge, even We could guess enough to make you divulge the truth. But...”

Lufas stopped as she regarded Dina with a somewhat surprised look.

“You seem quite human to be affected by news of your parents. Does that mean even the Goddess has some sort of emotion or sense of gratitude? Or...” Lufas paused. “Maybe you’re actually someone completely independent from the Goddess?”

“What fool thing are you—”

“It’s not that strange an idea. Even if you have the same memories and personality as the Goddess, just the fact that you were born means you have had a completely different lifetime’s worth of experiences from her. Your parents aren’t the Goddess’s parents, and your parents love you, not the Goddess. The things you have experienced have not been experienced by the Goddess herself, so you would be a completely different person.”

What Lufas was saying wasn’t actually all that wrong. No matter how similar they were, the Goddess was not her avatar. As soon as they had started living different lives, they were no longer the same. If, for example, the Goddess were to enter a body with no will and started to control it remotely, then that body would definitely be the Goddess. However, that wasn’t the case here. Because of the Goddess’s massive existence, she was unable to look at the world in detail. That was exactly why the Goddess had to make avatars, so she could observe the world in detail through her avatars’ reports. This was the reason

why she gave her avatars free will, and occasionally, they would deviate from her designs.

At the very least, if Lufas was talking to the Goddess herself, she should show no interest towards Dina's parents. Most likely, she would be unable to tell them apart from any other member of their race.

"What is your name?"

"I believe I've already named myself."

"No, you haven't. You're not the Goddess. You have a real name. We know you do."

"It is not my real name. It is just a temporary name given to this body."

"You're stubborn, aren't you?" Lufas gave a strained laugh. Then, she seemed to have had an idea, as she took a bottle out of a pocket and pushed it into Dina's hands.

It was a drug invented through the joint efforts of herself and Megrez called an elixir. It was such a wonder drug, being able to cure any illness and even extend lifespans, that it was like the drug was meant to pick a fight with the Goddess. Dina didn't think too highly of it.

"Take that, and go where you want to."

"You're letting me go? How nice of you."

"There's no point in talking to you as you are now, after all. You are not the Goddess's avatar, and We look forward to talking with the real you."

"I don't think there will be a next time." Dina chuckled softly before disappearing.

Now that she'd been found once, the same thing wouldn't work again. Dina would have to find another way to observe them, or she would be caught again and would definitely be erased next time.

After passing through the Exgate and getting away from the tower, Dina looked around her and couldn't help but be shocked. She was in the elf village that was her birthplace. She'd unconsciously set this as her destination. *That was stupid of me... I know that didn't bother me at all.* Dina reflexively chastised

herself, but she still didn't move from that spot.

I should just leave. I should just open another Exgate and go someplace else. But something is keeping me here. I can't bring myself to leave. What's going on? Am I really being affected by emotion?

After a while, Dina spoke. "I'm just checking up on them. It's just a little interest, that's all."

While giving herself excuses, Dina stepped into the forest.

I'm sure I'll just be yelled at incessantly. They'll definitely say something like, "What do you even think you're doing here now of all times?" That's fine. I hope that happens. That way, I can get rid of any hangups I have. With that, Dina once again started doubting her own thoughts. *Hangups? What hangups? How idiotic. There's no way I have anything like that. I am a part of the Goddess.*

Dina moved further into the forest, and what she saw was her father, transformed and eaten away by illness, as well as her mother, who had already left this world.

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By the time Dina returned to the village, it was already walking the path of destruction. Her human mother had already reached the end of her life span and left this world, and her father was now just skin and bones. But it wasn't just her father. The village that Dina had been born in had already become a prison, its inhabitants waiting for death.

Dina was silent for some time.

She should have been unmoved. She thought she would feel nothing even when faced with this situation. After all, she was an offshoot of the Goddess. She just happened to have been born here, and she had no attachment to this place at all.

Why, though? Why am I so affected by this sight? It feels as if someone dumped some ice down my back. My knees are shaking too. I've seen sights like

this so many times up until now. They were too small for me to do anything about them myself, but I know that sights like this have been created over and over, all over thanks to the Moon ouroboros. I made sure to let some humans die off whenever they started to become too populous, and an entire race has even died out because of that.

But... Was it really me who did all that? The Goddess did that, sure, but haven't I actually never seen something like this even once in my life?

"Ohhh, Dina... Welcome back."

Dina subconsciously approached her father's bed, her mind whirling in thought. Even though it'd been a hundred years since she'd left, her father had recognized her instantly. Dina reached out for his skeletal hand, and before she knew it, Dina had gripped his hand and was dumbfounded at how weak his grip was in turn.

People would always eventually die, leaving for the afterlife. Even the long-lived elves were no exception. Even though Dina had always known this, she was currently feeling shock and fear, as if this was the first time she'd ever realized this fact.

Why does the death of my mother, whom I only thought of as a passage with which to pass my avatar into the world, hurt me so much? Why does seeing my father, whom I only thought of as my mother's partner, so weak destroy me inside like this? Why are their smiles coming back to me now, of all times? I am an incarnation of the Goddess, so just a death or two shouldn't move me.

Up until now, Dina had never doubted that she was the Goddess. But now, that preconception had started to crumble. She couldn't help but feel the wall that ran between herself and the Goddess now. As for why that was, Dina just couldn't imagine that the Goddess, who should have been the main part of her being, was feeling the same pain that she was right now.

I just know that the Goddess doesn't even remember my father's name or face... She never cared enough to bother... I'm sure that even if he dies, she would only think something like, "Oh, the father of my avatar died."

"F-Father..."

I never thought of him as my father. To me, he was like any of the many specimens of humanity crawling around on the ground. But was he really? The smile he would always show to me, and the love my parents would shower me with, didn't they make me feel warm and comfortable? Haven't I received some measure of warmth from them, at least? Some happiness? Haven't I just been forcefully suppressing these feelings because of my pride as a part of the Goddess? I don't know. I can't find the answer to that.

I mean, I should be a piece of the Goddess made to mingle among the mortals. I should be her representative here... If I'm not, then who am I?

The first thing Dina imagined was a poorly made puppet in the form of the Goddess. The puppet's arms and legs were connected to strings, and the Goddess herself was controlling the puppet, playing with it from far on high.

She clutched at her clothing in an effort to stymie the pain she felt in her chest. When she did, she felt something hard inside. Reaching for it, she took out the bottle of elixir that Lufas had forced onto her. It was a forbidden drug that could cure any illness and even extend life spans. Its existence spat upon the Goddess, and Dina had even been considering just smashing it later. But now, she couldn't bring herself to do so for some reason.

Without either using it or breaking it, Dina just stood there, frozen, unsure of what she even wanted to do. That was when her excellent sense of hearing picked up on something, and the color drained from Dina's face. Something was coming... It was large and dangerous, and it was heading straight for this village. Its movement shook the earth and snapped trees in two.

Panicked, Dina almost flew out of the house only to see a huge, black scorpion monster which was knocking over entire houses in its path towards her.

The Queen of Poison... It's an emperor berserk scorpion...?! The emperor berserk scorpion was the strongest of the many scorpion-type monsters that existed, and she was considered a catastrophe-class threat. She housed every single type of poison under the sun inside her body. If she felt like it, she could cover the entirety of the planet in poison within several days, turning the place into a planet of death. She was designated as a super-threatening species.

This type of monster had appeared several times throughout history. Its

purpose was to curtail explosive population growth. If the Goddess judged that the population had grown enough to be able to upset the balance of the ecosystem, one would appear. It would create a new toxin that no living thing had resistance to on the spot, generating an epidemic that would drive the local population to extinction... In other words, it was a living plague.

Her level was 900. She wasn't quite at the level of worldwide deterrent powers, such as the Lion King and the Dragon King, but she was incredibly dangerous nevertheless. Having a catastrophe-class monster appear like this basically equaled the death of a population, or at least its decline. She was still attacking humans even now, driving them into the depths of fear like the unmitigable disaster that she was. This monster was the source of the epidemic that had ravaged this village.

Why...? It's true that elves have recently started to grow in population, but isn't this too early? And why did it have to be this village in particular? While having a glaring match with the Queen of Scorpions, Dina desperately wracked her brain. Elves were one of the Goddess's favorite races, and they were not numerous by any means. There was no reason for the monster to be here. In fact, she should have been dealing with the explosive growth of strength among the general population rather than bothering with this little community. So, why? *No...way...* There was only one reason Dina could think of, and that was because she was there.

As an avatar of the Goddess, she would most likely have to use the Goddess's name to appear in front of people more than once. In fact, the most effective way to eliminate Lufas would be to do just that. She would have to use the Goddess's name to declare Lufas as evil and incite sedition. But if the people were to find out that the one claiming to be the Goddess was born from a mortal womb if and when that were to happen, that might cause doubt among her listeners. They might think that she was just an imposter claiming the Goddess's name. In order to cut that possibility off, there was one simple answer: eliminate all who could know such a fact.

Dina had thought that manipulating memories would be more than enough, but it was clear that the one who had sent this scorpion didn't agree and was going to stamp out all the seeds of doubt. This meant that there was, in fact, a

clear difference in thinking between the avatar and the main body, which should have been the same person.

The Queen of Poison opened her mouth, and Dina reacted almost immediately, basically out of pure reflex.

“I call upon you, time!”

Dina quickly activated one of her unique skills, trapping the Queen of Poison in a prison of time. It was the unique skill, Yed Posterior, which cut the target out of time and slowed it down. The skill controlled the opponent’s time to dull its movements, and because it was possessed by an agent of the Goddess, it was irresistible and completely unfair. On top of that, this skill would only grow stronger with time, eventually stopping the target’s time and even going so far as to reverse it so that the target was reverted back to before it was even born, effectively deleting it from existence.

Dina also possessed the opposite of this skill, one to speed up time, and the common point between both of them was that they were unpreventable. Her unique skills had a higher priority than any other skill in the world. This was unknown to the vast majority, but skills did in fact have a priority to them. If, for example, a sure-hit skill were to clash with a sure-dodge skill, the one with the higher priority would take effect.

This priority scale was split into five tiers, with the highest priority being the highest tier. Agents of the Goddess like Dina and the ouroboroses, however, had unique skills with a priority of six, which meant they would always take priority over others and would never be canceled out by anything. Just by activating the skill, it would be the end; the skill would always work. These maximum-priority skills were like proof that you worked for the Goddess.

The Queen of Poison’s movements visibly slowed, but poison was already leaving its mouth. Slowly, ever so slowly but surely, the toxin made its way out of the prison of time. *Crap... OhcrapOhcrapOhcrap!* Even if the Queen of Poison were to stop, it would be too late if the poison cloud were to exit the skill’s field.

At the moment, the Queen of Poison was moving at 1/100,000ths its normal speed. It would be enough to call almost all other living things completely

stopped, but that also meant she was still moving, and not completely stopped. That just went to show how incredibly fast she was normally. The flow of time for the scorpion continued to slow. The Queen of Poison herself was almost motionless by now, but even then, the cloud of poison would exit Yed Posterior's field before it would completely stop.

Dina, the Goddess's avatar, had seven unique skills. Each one of them had a priority of six, making them unstoppable by almost any other skill. But among all her skills, none of them would solve this problem, and Dina did not have the time to create a new skill from scratch.

What should I do? What should I do?! If the mist of toxins were to leave Yed Posterior, I would be fine for a while, but the people of this village will be done for. At the very least, it would spell the end for my father, who's already at death's door. If the poison were to spread throughout the village, it wouldn't matter even if Dina resurrected them with heaven-arts. They would just die again straight away.

At this point, Dina had completely forgotten her pride as the embodiment of the Goddess and was desperately trying to find a way out of this situation. Yet in her panic and desperation, she didn't realize the simplest of things. She had actually been able to fix this all along. If the poison were to spread, then she could just use heaven-arts to cleanse the poison before resurrecting the villagers. She could also reverse time, so she could just reverse time for the entire village. Either way was extremely simple, but neither of those solutions had come to Dina's mind. Her panic had brought on further panic, causing her to lose the ability to make proper decisions.

Finally, the toxic mist had made its way to the edge of her prison of time.

"That ability is scarily strong, but you have no idea how to use it, do you? It's because you have such strong skills without any thought behind them that you can't adapt. You see, situations like these are extremely simple to solve."

Dina heard a confidence-filled voice coming from beside her, and the next thing she saw was a clenched fist at the edge of her vision. The owner of the voice confidently stepped forward, launching a strong punch. It was only a punch, but the outcome of it defied even imagination. A simple punch whipped

up a tornado that stretched up to the ends of the sky, sucking up all the poison into the upper atmosphere.

The Queen of Poison, who had only been grazed by the punch, was also carried up into the sky. Thanks to its weight, it was only barely able to avoid being launched up out of the stratosphere. Lufas clenched her fist once again, aiming to intercept it as it came back down.

“Looks like you’ve been the victim of quite the dull bout of manipulation. Well, you should wake with a punch anyway. We’ll make sure to hold back, so get ready for our all!”

That’s a contradiction. You’ll hold back, so she has to get ready for your all? What does that even mean? But the way this world and its skills worked allowed such contradictory statements to actually work.

Dina felt it instantly. The weight of Lufas’s presence suddenly and explosively rose as she broke through the level limit.

Normally, the Observing Eye skill wouldn’t work against those stronger than the user, but Dina was the Goddess’s avatar. She could ignore that restriction as she measured Lufas’s level, and she almost fainted when seeing that it was as ridiculously high as to be over 4000. The level limit was also a wall that limited the scope of destructive power. It was a defensive measure of the world that lessened the impact of blows so that power that was too strong would not destroy the world itself. If not for that, whenever someone moved faster than the speed of sound, a sonic boom would blast through the area they had traveled through, causing untold damage. If anyone were to surpass the speed of light, the world would probably perish.

Also, there was more than one wall. Just in case, there were a total of ten walls set every 1000 levels, which meant that there were also level barriers at level 2000 and 3000 as well. And right now, Lufas was over level 4000. She’d already broken through four barriers. In that state, the maximum damage she could deal was 999,999,999! It was possible for her to do almost a billion damage in a single blow.

Just like that, she applied the skill Blunted-Sword Strike. Any attack with the skill applied would always leave the victim at 1 HP, so Lufas unreservedly

smashed her full-strength punch into the Queen of Poison. Her huge body, at over one hundred meters long, was blasted out of the atmosphere into space this time, and she was sent on a rapid approach towards the sun. Even though the skill would make sure the victim would not die from the attack itself, it was still susceptible to death from other causes. In other words, if the scorpion were to crash into the sun, as she was threatening to do, the Queen of Poison's life would be forfeit.

However, Lufas had already gotten past the queen, kicking off of the surface of the sun to rocket back towards the scorpion. Later, Lufas would tell her friends, "That sun's heat is no joke," as she claimed that the bottoms of her feet felt quite hot, leaving them speechless.

Once again using Blunted-Sword Strike, Lufas kicked the queen a second time, forcing her back to Mizgarz. The queen fell towards the ground like a meteor as Lufas once again passed by her and stopped, waiting for her in midair. Lufas caught the falling queen in one hand and slowly set her down on the ground.

This entire exchange happened in less than a second. Dina's mouth hung open and wouldn't close.

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The elven village was safe. Rather, it had been saved. After that, the elixir was given to the villagers to heal their illness, and Dina's father was saved as well.

The scorpion had gotten attached to Lufas and was now clinging to her arm in human form. It might seem strange that she had fallen for Lufas after being beaten up so badly, but in the end, she was a monster. Her standards and tastes were just different. The scorpion might just have been attracted to violence so powerful she could never even stand a chance.

But Dina hadn't the leeway to pay that any mind. Her sense of identity had completely crumbled so she was completely preoccupied with that. She had been saved by Lufas, who she'd viewed as a threat. Now she was forced to recognize the unbridgeable gap in thought between her and the Goddess, who

she had once considered to be just the main version of herself.

Now that things had come to this, Dina was sure. There was no way she couldn't be. *I am not the Goddess in physical form. I'm just a person who got the Goddess's personality and memories copied onto them... I'm a puppet. Once the Goddess tried to kill my father and I rejected that plan, our paths split. But, where does that leave me? Just who or what am I?*

While Dina was stuck inside her head, her father, who was still lying on the floor, called out to her weakly. "Oh, Dina, you were okay. Thank goodness."

Dina felt something hot gathering in the corner of her eye.

I threw away my mother and my father. I threw away this village, saying nothing as I left. I looked down my nose at them, believing that I was the Goddess, and I never even knew or cared that my mother had died up until now. But he hasn't changed. He still loves his daughter. He worried for me.

Ah, that's it. Didn't he used to call me that? He's called me that ever since I was born. Not a borrowed name like Alovenus, but my name, Dina.

Dina had realized the truth. She couldn't help it.

I am not Alovenus. Even if I was given a scrap off the edge of her soul, even if I have her memories and personality... I'm different, and I cannot become Alovenus ever again. After all, I love these people so much. I feel so happy after saving them. These feelings are mine and mine alone. They are not the Goddess's.

That day, the girl who should have been the Goddess's avatar became a simple girl named Dina.



* *

A few years later.

“Looks like this is the end. So We were a little too late in noticing...”

Currently present were the Black-Winged King, who had almost the entire world in her hands, and her mysterious advisor who followed the king around like a shadow: Ophiuchus of the Conquering Thirteen Heavenly Stars... That had been the name and role given to Dina. By using her unique skills, she blended into the background. She used her manipulation abilities to keep herself unknown, even to her allies, completely erasing her presence. Among the original Twelve, the only ones who knew there was a Thirteenth star were Taurus, Parthenos, and Aquarius, and even they didn't know Dina's real name. All they were privy to was the fact that there was a thirteenth star named Ophiuchus. They didn't even know what she looked like.

“It's not over yet. I know you'll be able to beat all of them and start over.”

At the moment, they were being cornered. It could definitely be said that they were in unprecedented danger. The Goddess, who had judged that the Devil King would not be enough to deal with Lufas, had taken control of Alioth and the others by growing hatred and jealousy towards Lufas in order to incite them to rebellion. Out of their many subordinates, over half of them had also betrayed the nation. Those with an especially strong sense of loyalty or strength of spirit had stayed under Lufas, but if the two divided forces were to clash, the outcome was clear... At least, if things proceeded normally.

However, Lufas was anything but normal. She could win this fight by herself. Dina recommended that, but Lufas did not seem to be cheered up by it.

“Yeah, you're probably right. But you know, Ophiuchus, would anyone actually be willing to follow a ruler who has killed all her friends and comrades? A lord who kills over half her friends and subjects is nothing but a tyrant. No one would bend the knee. Also, if We were to claim victory by killing all our friends and followers, We would have nothing left.” Lufas paused. “Whether We win or lose, We lose everything. It was our loss as soon as it got to this point.”

It was possible for her to win. That is, if winning was all that mattered. But if she committed to that, Lufas would lose her friends. The country she was supposed to protect and rule over would be burned down by her hands, and she would have to murder countless people. To her, doing so would be the true defeat.

“At the very least you have the Twelve Stars. And me.”

Dina’s words brought a small smile to Lufas’s face. “You’re right. We suppose that’s our only saving grace.”

Lufas sunk into thought for a while, but once she’d made sense of her ideas she looked up at Dina.

“There’s no other choice than to decide on a ‘way to lose.’”

“A...way to lose?”

“Indeed. If they all want us to abdicate the throne so badly, then why not give them their wish? And with that deception, we can use this opportunity to find who brought this situation to bear.”

“But...”

“It will be a hard road for you. If you want to leave our side, now is the time.”

Lufas had no intention of rebuking her, even if she left. But even in the face of that offer, Dina smiled courageously.

“I will not, Miss Lufas. I will never return to being a puppet. I was just a puppet with no will of her own until I met you... You gave me my own self. So for you, I’ll deceive even the Goddess.”

Deception is easy. I’ve been doing it since I was born, after all. So I’ll get it done. I’ll trick the devilfolk, deceive the Twelve Stars, fool the Seven Heroes, and dupe Lufas. I’ll even have the Goddess believing my lies. I’ll slither along the ground like a snake, throw every faction into disorder, and sow confusion everywhere I go.

It doesn’t matter if all that’s waiting for me is the hatred of my allies and the brand of a traitor. I’ll show the Goddess that this is me, this is the woman named Dina! Snake Charmer, huh? My master’s got quite the taste for ironic

names. Making forbidden fruit, dragging each and every one of the Goddess's servants down to the ground to join her side... She's the real snake, truly the king of evil spoken of in myths. But I am the snake charmer, so I'll lead the snake that she is by the nose. She has to learn the truth.

"Good, then what you have to do is..."

Several weeks later, Dina was in the traitor's camp. She stood on the side of the Seven Heroes, who had rebelled, looking for just the right person while moving among the crowd like a shadow. Eventually, she found a young elven man. He had been hit by Lufas's Pressure and was so scared he was unable to move. Seeing that, the edges of Dina's mouth curved upwards. *I'll just borrow some of your memories... Hmm, I see. So you have connections with royals... Pretty good.*

Dina quietly sidled up to the trembling young man, activating her memory- and recognition-manipulation abilities. She increased his fear towards Lufas, inducing him to want to run away while also planting a single order into his subconscious. The order would take place two hundred years in the future; it was the conviction that he needed to summon a hero to combat the threat of the Devil King. Dina also gave him knowledge of how to use Exgate along with the order, as well as several other pieces of knowledge and tips on how to use magic. She also guided him towards serving in the government of a country. Almost all the high-level people would die in this battle, so even with such a vague and unambitious order, there was no doubt he would manage to work his way up to becoming a central pillar of a country through the coming years.

Lastly, Dina made sure there was a fatal flaw in his knowledge of how to use Exgate. When he tried to summon the hero, instead of reaching all the way to the other world, it would instead reach to somewhere in the middle—not quite the other world but past the boundaries of Mizgarz. With that, he would eventually try to summon a hero, and when he did, he would accidentally call Lufas.

This completely worthless-seeming young man was given the great task of calling Dina's master back to this world. Not even the Goddess would be wary of a person like this. Just like that, a pitiful young elf became a ticking time bomb, and Dina left for the battlefield in order to pull a trick during the climax

of the battle.

When Megrez activated his sealing magic, Dina would activate an Exgate with perfect timing, thus sending Lufas into subspace. Of course, all this would apply to Lufas unconditionally. Normally, traveling through an Exgate would require the traveler's express permission, but Lufas had already given hers, so there was no need to ask in this case. With this, it would look to everyone else like the great heroes had defeated Lufas.

“Well done! Well done, heroes, you have surpassed us! We have nothing but heartfelt admiration for your bravery and strength! But do not forget, the darkness has not yet been cleared. With your unity, you might even be able to defeat the Devil King. But should you lose that unity, this world will be plunged into even deeper darkness. Whether your path is one of light or darkness, We will be watching raptly from the depths of hell! Ke ha ha ha ha ha... HAAAA HA HA HA HA HA!!!”

Wow, Lufas is really into it. Isn't she actually really enjoying her role as the final boss? And she even managed to slip in a warning that their unity was important. The “lesson” was so obvious Dina couldn't help but let out a weird laugh. But she shouldn't have let herself get distracted.

Dina felt someone's gaze on her, and she turned to see Pollux staring at her as their eyes locked.

Oh crap. She definitely misunderstands. Seeing someone with the spitting image of the Goddess laughing quietly, seeing Lufas get sealed... That's way too suspicious! Even if I manage to erase this memory, she'll probably still think I'm suspicious. Dina hurriedly disappeared from that spot, leaving the battlefield behind entirely.

Dina had made a small mistake, but even with that, everything had gone well. Right after the battle, Dina went to the border between worlds to meet with Lufas.

“What was with that ending, Miss Lufas! I couldn't stop myself from laughing, and I was seen by Pollux!”

“That would be our question... To be seen by her, of all people...”

“It’s your fault, Miss Lufas! You were so into playing the final boss!”

“Well, We just... We were just so happy because they’d all become so strong...”

Alioth and the others would never have guessed that behind the scenes after such an intense battle such an inane conversation was taking place. The argument between Dina and Lufas continued for a little while, but once they realized the conversation was going nowhere, the two got back on point.

“Now then... From here, you will make an avatar, Miss Lufas. After that, I will stop your main body’s time and seal it here. Then, I will send your avatar to the future to evade the watch of the Goddess, use some sort of method to give your avatar information about this world, and return that avatar to your real body two hundred years later for the summoning. Understood?”

“Yes.” Lufas paused. “Ah, right. Would it be possible to change the avatar’s gender?”

“Huh? Well, you’re just giving someone your memories, personality, and part of your soul... Are you seriously planning to become a man?”

“No, it was a joke.”

Later, when Dina would think back on this moment, she would regret that she didn’t pursue the matter more. Not even she could predict that Lufas would actually make a male avatar. Her reason for becoming a man was probably because she wanted to be able to take an objective look at herself. The plan was no doubt to become a completely different person by assuming the opposite gender in order to objectively look at the deeds of Lufas Maphaahl with her own eyes and figure out why she had been betrayed. Of course, there were probably other goals, such as to make it even harder for the Goddess to find her, and to make the avatar as far removed from the original as possible, so that it would not become “Lufas” again once she was to leave it. It was also possible that she just wanted to take the opportunity to see what it was like to be a man. Either way, she was impossible to read.

After extracting the piece of Lufas’s soul that would become the base of the avatar, Dina took that piece and went to the future before letting go of it. Even if Dina left it alone, it would simply find some appropriate baby about to be

born and inhabit it, thus completing the avatar. There was no need to watch over it anymore. After seeing it off, Dina returned to the past in order to make arrangements to give the child the proper memories while it was growing up.

Having gone back to her original time, Dina used memory and recognition manipulation to blend into Japan and start a company. Then, around the start of the Heisei era, Dina released a game with a world that resembled Mizgarz. It was just a trial product, so it was made as an offline game and sold under the name *Exgate*. After that, Dina immediately made an *Exgate* TRPG before finally creating and releasing *Exgate Online*, which sported a game system that really strongly resembled the one on Mizgarz.

There was no need to worry whether or not Lufas's avatar would play. After all, her avatar would subconsciously remember their old world. The avatar would definitely become hooked on this world. There was no way they wouldn't be interested.

However, because this game was so faithful to its origins, the balance was quite bad, which was a problem. Because of that, it was a little... Actually, it received really bad reviews online, and if things stayed as they were, the game would lose its player base and have to shut down. *L-Looks like I can't afford to choose my methods. Anyway, the first and most important thing is to have the avatar play this game. In order to do that, it needs some fame.*

Dina was sure that the avatar would play as long as they knew of the game, but there was the possibility that *Exgate Online* would end as an unknown shit game. So, Dina decided to cheat. She added her manipulative abilities to a commercial, thus forcing people to hold interest in her game and turning it popular. This was the reason why *Exgate Online* was so popular regardless of the fact that it was a shit game with no balance.

After confirming that Lufas had appeared in the game, Dina then manipulated events so that they matched Mizgarz's history. Dina picked a number of players out of the crowd with characters that resembled the Seven Heroes who also logged in often to indirectly manipulate. By giving them encounters such as "luckily" getting a rare item drop or "luckily" meeting rare monsters that gave high exp, Dina guided them into becoming top players. Thanks to that, she was able to send them gifts under the excuse of them being top players that gave

them the names they should have had—Alioth, Benetnasch, and whatnot. Dina taught the Alioth character about the secret Chosen class through a “coincidental” event, thus affecting his build.

Furthermore, Dina created her own separate account and character and mixed in among Lufas and the others so she could guide the direction of their chat conversations and bring about the same history as that of Mizgarz.

“It’s boring to just have one huge power, so let’s break up by doing something big...”

The reason why such a ridiculous player-made event managed to happen was because the devs were actually in on it. Everything went smoothly, almost as if the devs were playing favorites, which was realized by people on the message boards. They were right... The management was, in fact, playing favorites.

After that, Dina detected a warp in space—an Exgate—so she sent her personal character, the Goddess of Creation, Alovenus, to Lufas’s avatar to extend the invitation before teleporting there herself. A piece of the gaming avatar’s soul was retrieved, and the avatar was put to sleep. With that, the avatar tipped forward, so Dina never got a look at the avatar’s face before she left. Thanks to that, she never realized until it was too late that the avatar was male, another failure on her part.

As an aside, after Dina left Earth, her manipulation over the people there was undone, and thanks to *Exgate Online*’s terrible game balance, it lost its player base quickly. Thus, the game finally bit it and shut down.

24

While she was producing a game in Japan and feeding Lufas’s avatar information with it, Dina made sure to periodically return to Mizgarz. Her objective: to observe the Devil King Orm.

Normally, he should have left the stage for a while after Lufas’s defeat, but for some reason, he had fought off the heroes and forced a continuation to this farce. It was only natural for the Goddess to harbor some doubts about him, so

Dina had been given the order to watch over the Devil King.

To Dina, who wanted to focus her efforts on her Japan activities, this was a rather unfortunate miscalculation. What was even worse was that the Sun ouroboros's avatar had grown an ego and had started to act as the Goddess's subordinate as well. Pollux, Parthenos, Taurus, and Aquarius should all have already started their work sealing the ouroboroses, but those dragons weren't so weak as to be able to be suppressed just like that. They could summon avatars all of a sudden, and those avatars could even have wills of their own.

This worst-case scenario had come to pass, which meant that Dina not only had to watch the Devil King, but she also had to be careful not to let her betrayal be seen through. She was far past being a double spy. While playing the role of an agent of the Goddess who snuck into the ranks of the devilfolk perfectly, she also had to manage her business in Japan.

Even so, there were also happy coincidences. As someone who had also raised the flag of rebellion against the Goddess, the Devil King became Dina's accomplice, and they helped cover for each other, turning their relationship into a mutually beneficial one. The Devil King did indeed already know of Dina's true identity. He knew, and he purposefully let her do her thing because he knew that letting her go would be better for him.

Then, on the fated day, the Goddess had the idea to implant Lufas with a fake personality. She wanted to pick a random peace-addled person from Japan and switch their personality into Lufas to make her easier to control, thus turning a feared enemy into a pawn. But most likely, even she had never expected that Lufas already had an avatar in Japan.

Dina and Lufas took advantage of that to take Lufas's avatar and copy it back onto Lufas herself with the Goddess's consent. Just like that, Lufas had managed to be summoned back to Mizgarz, having retrieved the piece of her soul that she had given up. All this meant that the current Lufas—the "stranger pretending to be Lufas"—had actually just been Lufas herself this whole time. That was why she never hesitated to fight, as well as why she had never been affected by anything she had killed. Of course, she wouldn't lust after women, and she had set her speech pattern in stone as a sort of subconscious defense mechanism so that she wouldn't lose herself. All this had just been a front too.

She would wake up with just a small push.

It was only natural to dream. Have you ever become a person with impossible abilities in your dreams? Or maybe you've become your favorite fictional or game character in your dreams? When that happened, did you suddenly start acting as them with no hesitation? Anything huge that would have you asking, "The hell was that dream? That's way too weird," wouldn't seem strange at all in a dream; you'd just dismiss it as natural. Of course, it would be possible to recognize that you were in a dream while still inside it. However, that was exceedingly rare. Even when faced with ridiculous situations which your normal judgment would instantly recognize as such, a dreamer would only accept it. Then what if you weren't yourself in a dream? Even then, you would just accept any impossible setting and move accordingly.

Lufas was in just such a state, meaning that she was dreaming that she was an impostor who was possessing herself. In the end, though, she was basically just half-asleep, so whenever she fought strong enemies, like Benetnasch, she would slowly be shaken awake. In situations like that, she would awaken completely, though, but as soon as Lufas realized that now was not the time to awaken, she would be forced back to sleep and continue the act. However, she was getting closer and closer to awakening and becoming herself again.

All this was moving according to Lufas and Dina's plan, serving to deceive the Goddess. If, for example, Lufas were to have come back to Mizgarz in her full, normal state, the Goddess would have activated the ouroboroses without giving her the time to gather her allies. In order to avoid that, Lufas had to make sure to play the fool.

But the time for that was over. The Twelve Stars were all gathered and preparations were complete. All that was left was to clear up any remaining obstacles and claim the right to challenge the Goddess. So, Dina completely removed the memory manipulation she'd cast on Lufas.

* * *

I'm awake.

It's a bit clichéd, but there's no need for me to— Oh, there's no point in acting anymore, I guess. It feels much more natural to refer to myself as a woman

now. I no longer feel like I've become someone else. I don't have any blanks in my memory. I remember the times before I was sealed, the times when I was half-asleep, and all of it was me. I hadn't been switched out with someone else at all.

It felt like I had gone to sleep at night and dreamed of a slightly different version of myself who I acted out without question, and now it was morning and time to wake up. The worry that I was being overwritten by Lufas and would soon no longer be myself seemed like a ridiculous thought now.

Now that the curtain had been pulled back, it all turned out to be a one-person show, planned out and acted by me. I played myself and had been afraid of myself. It was rather laughable, if I do say so myself. I'd apparently written a comedy.

"Ah... Mmm...! That was a nice nap. It's rare to feel this great."

"I bet. After all, you've been sleeping for two hundred years."

My speech pattern was no longer stuck in place. Now that I knew that I was myself, I could change my speech pattern any way I wanted. In fact, this locked-in speech pattern was actually something I changed into before. I suppose I should first fix the way I refer to myself.

"Good work, Ophiuchus. Well done deceiving all and completing your duty. Only you could have come this far... Thank you."

"I am not worthy of such words."

"Well done"... Those two words were all I could think of. She'd tricked me and deceived the rest of the world as well, including all of humanity, the devilfolk, and even the Goddess. She had trickled me information while I was half asleep to lead me to the truth, all while manipulating the devilfolk to prevent humanity's destruction and still managing to evade the watchful eye of the Ouroboros of Heaven's avatar. She watched her timings and made sure to act and catch Terra's suspicion so that she could leave the devilfolk's side without arousing suspicion from the Ouroboros of Heaven's avatar, thus permanently evading his gaze. Then, she left with perfect timing in concert with Pollux's actions, pretending to hide herself while moving to another world where the Goddess couldn't see her, thus leading me to this world where I could fully

awaken.

For now... Let's just check my own stats.

【Lufas Maphaahl】

【Level】: 4200

【Race】: Heaven-Winged

【Class Levels】:

- Warrior: 200
- Swordmaster: 200
- Archer: 200
- Gunner: 200
- Grappler: 200
- Champion: 200
- Monster Tamer: 200
- Alchemist: 200
- Ranger: 200
- Strider: 200
- Acolyte: 200
- Priest: 200
- Esper: 200
- Pyschicer: 200
- Mage: 200
- Sorcerer: 200
- The Archenemy: 1000

【HP】: 4405000

【SP】: 99999

【STR (Strength)】: 80580

【DEX (Dexterity)】: 38025

【VIT (Vitality)】: 53170

【INT (Intelligence)】: 65370

【AGI (Agility)】: 65034

【MND (Mind)】: 45045

【LUK (Luck)】: 49194

【Equipment】:

▪ Head: —

▪ Right arm: —

▪ Left arm: —

▪ Body: Shirt and jeans

▪ Legs: Fancy shoes

▪ Other: Hoodie

Good, no change from before I was sealed. I was worried I might have been a little rusty, but it looks like I managed to exercise, even when half-asleep. I was undoubtedly in my best condition. As I was now, I felt like I could punch apart a star. I felt the desire to test out my power, but we were still in Japan. If I did that, then just the aftershocks would destroy everything. Testing would have to wait until we returned to the other side.

I looked over at my two companions, and Dina was smiling even while sweating, while Benet was looking more and more ready to fight as she looked over at me with her arms crossed. *I guess I should undo Alkaid for now. There's no point in keeping it on here.*

After a moment, Dina let out a relieved sigh. “Whew.”

Apparently, I had been letting off a lot of unnecessary pressure towards my surroundings while I was fully unleashed. I checked my arm only to find that the

bangle I was wearing to seal my stats had cracked. It seemed as if it wasn't strong enough to affect my serious mode. *Oh no, I wasted it. Oh well, I can just fix it later.*

"I honestly still don't know exactly what's going on, but... Basically, everything was moving according to your plan this whole time, right? Even that fight two hundred years ago?" asked Benet.

"I do feel guilty about tricking you back then, but there was no other way. Even if I had won, the Goddess would just have activated the ouroboroses and reset the world."

Two hundred years ago, I had ducked out on a promise I made with Benet to have a final fight, but at that point, I was already checkmated, so even if I had won, nothing would have been left. If I had managed to win back then, the Goddess would just have activated the ouroboroses, and Mizgarz would have had all life wiped from it. If that were to have happened, it would've been my loss anyway. A Pyrrhic victory like that, which left nothing on my side, wouldn't be a victory at all. So at the time, I had no choice but to lose and leave the stage, and I couldn't afford for Benet and the power she brought to be lost as a side effect of that.

Benet hesitated. "You changed the way you refer to yourself."

"Yeah, I just went back to how it was in the past. Right now, I'm not a ruler or anything, after all. I'm just Lufas Maphaahl."

Up until now, I'd always referred to myself as "I" in my head and "We" out loud. As a result, I wasn't able to strike a good balance between my mind and my body. The me who had been acting as "me" had subconsciously had the habits of a pretentious king soaked into it, and that was why I'd acted so strangely. But that was all over now. Right now, I was not me as I was when I had thought I was male, nor was I the ruler who referred to themselves with the royal "we."

I'd lost once and retired from the stage, but now, I was back as just a single, stubborn heaven-winged. Therefore, it wouldn't be a bad choice to return to how I had referred to myself in the past, back when I had just been an adventurer fighting for my livelihood.

There was something I'd understood after having gained an objective, unbiased perspective. I had been too impatient as a ruler. I chased ideals for the sake of the ideals alone, not giving any thought to my surroundings, and I committed cruel acts in order to fulfill my goals with ease. I wanted to give people memories of fun. I wanted them to live in a present where they could sleep without fear. I wanted to build a place where people could welcome tomorrow with hope in their hearts.

But the reality was the exact opposite. In my desire to solve the fearsome threat of the devilfolk, I myself became an even greater source of fear. My ideals had, at some point, become nothing but delusions, and my very existence represented something far removed from peace. Because I existed, the people couldn't have fun memories. They couldn't have a present where they could sleep peacefully. And they couldn't look to the future with hope.

I'd noted this before... It was only natural that they had turned their backs on me. Just being able to realize that made this entire farce worth it.

"By the way, Ophiuchus... No, would Dina be better?"

"Either way"

"I see. Then Dina... That person's shown their tail, haven't they?"

"Yes, just as you wanted."

I couldn't stop myself from smiling. Dina followed suit, a smile blooming on her face as she brushed back some of her hair.

It had been worth playing the fool, then. Thanks to that, I'd managed to get someone who would normally never show an opening to do just that. They'd made a clearly recognizable mistake. Now all that was left was to take full advantage.

"Now then..."

I brushed back my bangs with a small smile. The Twelve Stars were gathered. I'd toured around humanity's territories and met Megrez, Merak, and Mizar, so the goal was close. There were only a few enemies left. No, there was always only one enemy for me. Benet was...formidable, but she was more of a friend than an enemy; that was an unchangeable fact, so she didn't count.

Waiting for my next words, Dina tensed up and Benet smiled, showing her fangs. So as to live up to their expectations, I opened my mouth. “Let’s go buy up all the games and food we want before going back.”

The two of them fell in unison.

“Wait a second, Miss Lufas, you can’t be serious! You were so cool up until now, talking like a big boss and everything!” cried Dina.

“Are you seriously playing around right now, Maphaahl?” asked Dina.

The complaints came flying in, but *Ahhh-Aahhhhh can’t heearrr yoouuuuu!* Bouts of coolness were meant to be broken, or so I’d heard from a fictional vampire. After all, we wouldn’t have many chances to visit this world. I hadn’t bought any souvenirs for the other members still on the other side either.

Also... Yeah, now that my memories were back, I never had been a real resident of this place, which meant that I had never actually tried any Japanese food other than the burger I just had. Now that I’d thought of that... Well? Wouldn’t anyone really get a craving?

Hmm? Nothing’s changed from before I got my memories back, you say? ...Shaddap. So I’ve always been like this, so what?

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Right now, all the Twelve Heavenly Stars apart from Leon and Taurus were gathered aboard the *Argo* along with Terra and Luna. Aquarius and Pisces, who were newly reunited with the gang, were overjoyed. Pisces was called Eros again, which brought tears to his eyes, and they felt relief that nothing had changed in two hundred years. Though they were duly surprised when they heard that Parthenos had gone to the other side and was now only visiting, thanks to Pollux’s skill. However, there were benefits to being a heroic spirit. The arm she’d lost in the fight with Sol was already back. Her near invincibility was thanks to her having a false body.

At any rate, they were all waiting for Lufas’s return while talking about what

they should do next, with Pollux taking the reins of the conversation. Specifically, they discussed how to deal with Sol.

“That man said he’d be going after the current heroes. That is to say, he’ll be aiming for either Megrez, Merak, or Benetnasch.”

“We can probably take Benetnasch out of that list. She’s acting along with our master, and even if they’ve split up, she’d be able to defeat Sol anyway,” said Libra.

If Sol was speaking the truth, then he would be going after one of the Seven Heroes next, of which only Megrez, Merak, and Benetnasch were left alive. However, Libra had immediately written Benetnasch off of the list of potential victims. No matter how buffed up they were, the man named Sol had been fended off by Terra, the three bird musketeers, and Castor. That implied that he was not at the level of Benetnasch. Even if left alone, the Vampire Princess wouldn’t be done in, so they would be able to concentrate on Megrez or Merak.

“Why not just leave it alone?” asked Scorpius. “Why do we care what happens to them? In fact, it would just save us the bother of killing them ourselves.”

“I agree with that opinion. We have no reason to be concerned over the fate of the Seven Heroes. Just let them die,” Aigokeros said.

Both Scorpius and Aigokeros, the most radical of the Twelve Heavenly Stars, gave harsh opinions here. These two, who were excellent at bearing grudges, had no intention of ever forgiving the traitorous Seven Heroes. If they were to die, that would be just fine to the two of them. At most, they’d just think that they were saved the effort of dealing with some enemies, since their enemies were busy dealing with each other. This opinion was shared amongst almost all of the Twelve Heavenly Stars as well, though they wouldn’t say that out loud.

“Seriously though, is there even any real gain from them killing off the weakened members of the Seven Heroes? That Sol guy’s not even an ally of the devilfolk, right?” Aquarius, with her human upper torso sticking out of the pitcher that was her main body, gave voice to her doubts.

“True. We can’t figure out the point. If We were Sol, then We would first prioritize waking up all of the ouroboroses,” said Pisces, echoing Aquarius.

Sol was on the Goddess's side. If they were to just accept that as fact, there was no reason at all to attack the Seven Heroes right now, considering his position.

"There are more important things to talk about now that Aquarius is here. Shouldn't we be making more Nectar to raise our strength?"

"Sorry, not enough materials. Also, your stats are all so boosted already, drinking Nectar's gonna do almost nothing, you know?" Aquarius waved her hand in front of her face, signaling that it would be impossible to make Pisces's idea a reality.

Nectar... It was a divine potion that only Aquarius could make, and for that reason, the country she'd made shared its name with this drink. Aquarius's original form was that of a divine artifact whose sole purpose was to create this potion. It was a miraculous liquid that would raise the drinker's stats, but its effects weakened the stronger the drinker was and would eventually require rarer and rarer ingredients to work on them.

For example, Aries had once downed tons of mass-produced nectar made from cheap materials when he was weak in order to strengthen his stats. If he were to drink the same stuff now, it would have basically no effect at all, and the amount of money that would probably have to be spent to raise Lufas's stats by even 1 would probably number in the tens of billions. It was basically unusable at that point.

The people here were nowhere near as strong as Lufas, but they were still quite strong. It would take tens of millions to raise one of their stats by 1, so it was far from cost efficient. Unfortunately, Nectar was a sort of plot device specifically for weak people.

Aquarius stopped talking there, and the subject turned back to dealing with Sol.

Parthenos crossed her arms as she brought up the first idea she thought of. "Going back to the original subject, isn't Sol just thinking that it would be a lot of trouble if the heroes were to team up with us, so he's going to kill them off now? Or maybe he's going to frame Lufas for the heroes' deaths in a plan to make us war with humanity?"

“That seems possible... Honestly, though, even if humanity were to oppose us, they wouldn’t even be much of a threat to M E with how weak they are now.”

With that statement from Karkinos, the conversation stalled as no one could find a good counterargument.

What Parthenos suggested could possibly be true. The plan two hundred years ago had been similar too. The Goddess heightened the people’s fear of Lufas in order to pit them against her and cause her downfall. However, the situation was different now compared to back then. In those days, the opposition was composed of great warriors trained by Lufas herself, ironically. The strength of humanity as a whole was the highest it had ever been in history, and that was why they had been able to stand against Lufas.

However, in this era, humanity was weak enough to count the Sword Saint Friedrich as one of the strongest of their number... Well, to be more precise, it was more like they’d returned to normal before Lufas than that they’d gotten weaker, but as things stood now, even a single one of the Twelve Heavenly Stars could drive them all to destruction. Indeed, they would not even work as enemies.

“As I thought, we should probably be looking at this as a ploy to divide our forces. I think we should leave the heroes alone and focus on reuniting with Taurus.”

Libra sounded heartless, but she did offer a solid plan of action. There was really no benefit from killing the Seven Heroes, so even if that were to actually happen, it wouldn’t be much of a problem for them. What would be scarier was if they took this threat to the Seven Heroes seriously and split their forces trying to protect them, thus allowing the other side to be able to move as they pleased in the meanwhile and pick them off one by one. If Merak or Megrez were to actually die, it would be no loss to them, so ignoring the Seven Heroes was a valid choice.

That was the conclusion that Libra had drawn. *Yes, it must never be misunderstood... We are not allies of humanity—we are simply a third force that obeys only Lufas.*

But just before things seemed all but decided, Pollux threw in her two cents. “What if the death of the Seven Heroes isn’t a goal, but a method?” she asked after a long silence.

There was no problem if the heroes were to die at the moment. Pollux’s personal feelings aside, it would, at the very least, not affect them militarily at all. But the fallout of their deaths could still affect them. That was how Pollux thought of it.

“What do you mean?”

“Aries... If I remember correctly, the hero’s party is with Megrez, correct?” asked Pollux.

“Yeah,” he said. “It sounded like they needed to talk to him about something.”

“Then what would the hero think if Megrez were to be murdered before his very eyes?”

“Uh... Well, I think he’d be mad.”

“You’re right. Then what if Sol, who would have killed Megrez, claimed to be a devilfolk?”

“Wouldn’t he hold a grudge against them?” Aries answered Pollux’s questions with a puzzled face, wondering why she was asking such obvious questions.

However, Aries’s answers seemed to give Pollux food for thought, and her expression grew steadily grimmer. “Right, he would most likely start to hate the devilfolk, but he won’t be powerful enough to have his revenge... So wouldn’t that make it the perfect situation for the Goddess’s usual pattern?”

“Ah!”

“Wouldn’t that be his aim? Take down the current hero to birth the next generation. Orm’s become the Goddess’s enemy now... Wouldn’t she want a hero to defeat him? Also, the Seven Heroes’ deaths would definitely light the fire of hatred under humanity.” Pollux paused, thinking. “Turning anger and hatred into power... The hero might have a skill that could do that.”

Pollux was just making a conjecture, but given the situation, it definitely

seemed likely. The Goddess could birth a new level 1000 hero and give him her blessing on top of that. With all that, the new hero might even be able to fight against Benetnasch equally. This hero would unify all of humanity, concentrate their wills, and if he were to engage in battle alongside the ouroboroses, he might be able to bring about a miracle, a repeat of two hundred years ago.

“Understood. If you’ve thought that far, then let us send forces to Merak and Megrez. However, given that it could also be a trap, we should make sure to deploy enough power to break through any such machinations as well. I will go to Taurus myself while the rest of you deploy to intercept Sol,” said Libra.

“You’re going by yourself?”

“Retrieving Taurus should not result in a fight. I alone should be fine for just reuniting with him and bringing him back.” Silence reigned as Libra suddenly remembered something. “Ah, I suppose I will also need one of the argonautai to replace Taurus.”

Libra’s idea was to deploy all their forces to be able to react in case of a trap. If there was a trap, it would be fine to just destroy it all at once with enough power that no trap would make a difference. It was a simple plan, but there were cases where simply brute-forcing a situation proved much more effective than trying to make an overcomplicated plan based on too many variables. In fact, brute force tended to work better the more of a tactician the enemy was.

After some thought, Pollux eventually gathered her wits and nodded. “You’re right. Your plan might be better. But it’s also a possibility that he’s trying to lead us out so that he can go for Taurus instead. It was strange that he’d tell us his plans in the first place. You’ll need to be plenty careful yourself.”

“It will not matter, even if he does come. I will beat him back.”

Libra sounded confident, but Pollux simply regarded her silently. *I suppose I should have expected this. She doesn’t think even a little bit that she could lose.*

Actually, if Sol was to go for Taurus, he would just end up having to face both Libra and Taurus in battle. With Taurus in the fight, the Goddess’s blessing would have no effect. After landing a first hit with Brachium to leave Sol near death, a punch from Taurus would probably end it. The member of the argonautai accompanying her wouldn’t be weak either. There was no reason

they would lose.

“Then let’s get started.”

Lufas was probably still looking for Dina, so, with their master not present, they would simply have to clear as many of the remaining problems as they could by themselves. With that resolution made, the Twelve Heavenly Stars sprung into action.

* *

“Well met. And welcome.”

Right now, the hero’s party as well as two others were currently guests at Megrez’s house. The two others were surprising. So surprising, in fact, that Kross was about to faint.

Sitting next to Megrez was a man with one wing, and sitting across from them was a golem made to look like a dwarf. One was the Sky King Merak, and the other was a golem controlled by the personality of the now-deceased Blacksmith King Mizar. In other words, three of the Seven Heroes were present. This fact flabbergasted Sei.

“I see. So he’s the new ‘hero.’ He’s got a good look in his eyes.”

“Does he? I just see a youngster.”

Both Merak and Mizar’s golem—which will from now on be referred to as Mizar for convenience—looked at Sei appraisingly. It was exceedingly uncomfortable. Sei was here so that he could report on the conclusions reached in conversation the other day, but it was a huge surprise to him that the number of heroes had multiplied.

“Um, Sir Megrez... What is...?”

“Oh, don’t worry about it. It’s nothing big. I just got a bit fired up from looking at you. I finally realized that my younger self would be laughing at me right now if he saw me sitting around doing nothing but hide.”

“Not to mention Lufas.”

“Totally. Just what have we been doing for two hundred years...?” Megrez and Merak both laughed, seemingly at themselves.

What were we even doing? They were the ones who wondered that the most. The answer was that they hadn't been doing anything. *It's as if we've been stopped in time since that event two hundred years ago. If only we hadn't done that. If only we'd done this. Ah, how foolish could we have been?*

They'd continued to pile regret upon regret until they stopped completely. If they made a mistake, they could just make up for it. If they were foolish, then all they had to do was correct anything they'd done wrong. But they never even tried. Instead, they lived, wasting time uselessly while looking at nothing but the past.

Just by fighting the Devil King a little and getting inflicted with a little curse, we acted like we'd taken enough punishment and stopped doing anything. But then what about this young man? The boy, having been summoned from another world, was now acting on behalf of a place he had no connection to. Even if he was weak, even if he wasn't nearly capable enough, even without the ability to split heaven and earth like Lufas, he was still doing his best. *Compared to him, how embarrassing can we get?*

"I had a thought when we talked before. It's true you're not powerful enough. You're not even comparable to us, let alone Lufas," said Megrez.

"Y-Yes, sir," stuttered Sei.

"But in exchange, you have something more important than the ability to fight. You have the strong will to always move forward no matter what. You believe in your own sense of justice. Even if a hundred people say the same thing, you'll still think for yourself, and you have the ability to always come to the correct—the just—choice. I'm sure that that is your greatest weapon."

In the past, Megrez and the others couldn't make the right choice. They lost to the Goddess's power and went down the wrong path. Even now, nothing had changed when it came to humanity. As always, they feared Lufas and shrunk away from her power. History was about to repeat itself.

But now Sei was here, and he was looking for the correct path. He alone was searching desperately for the road of peace. Thanks to that, they were now in a cooperative relationship with Lufas and her group, though it was in an incomplete form.

Upon hearing this, people might react by saying, “Anybody could do that.” They would be right. Anybody could accomplish such a feat. It required no special power. All he had to do was disregard the fact that he was summoned to be a hero, disregard how scary everyone told him Lufas was, make his own decision to get close to her and see her true nature, and then become friendly with her. Such a feat needed no martial prowess at all. Destroying planets was not something anyone could do. Only Lufas and Benetnasch were capable of that. However, anyone was capable of talking to the ones who could destroy planets. But to anyone who would actually say this out loud, Megrez would probably have this to say: “Then you try doing it.” And he would be right. Anybody could do it, but no one had. That was why things had devolved into such a big fight two hundred years ago.

No one—not even myself, Merak, Mizar, Alioth, Phecda, or Dubhe—did it. We just split up and tried to kill each other. That was why Megrez respected Minamijuuji Sei so much. Sei wasn’t even a tenth of Megrez’s age, and he also hadn’t a tenth of his power, but still, Megrez respected him. And that got Megrez thinking.

We should get time started for ourselves again. What kind of heroes would we be if all we did was rely on a boy from another world? What kind of “Wise King” would I be? If I really regret what happened before then, now is the time. I should be supporting this boy as best as I can!

After that, Megrez immediately attempted to contact the other heroes as soon as he had split up with Sei. As always, Benetnasch had ignored him, but apparently, both Merak and Mizar had met Lufas as well and received their own answers. So there was only one thing to do. Now was the time to make up for their past mistakes.

“Let us help you, hero. We will follow your orders.”

The powerless boy’s bravery had lit a fire under the other three heroes.

Dreams Come Alive

“This is just a thought of mine, but I think elves are all way too closed off for their own good. They should all experience how wide the world is. They need to look outwards more.”

In a small, dirty bar in a corner of the Trade City of Ydalir, Megrez the elf, a well-known heroic adventurer, talked of his dreams. He was speaking to members of his heroic adventuring party, the heaven-wingeds Lufas and Merak, Mizar the dwarf, Phecda the halfling, Dubhe the beastfolk, and Alioth the human. The seven of them were all of different races, but they were nonetheless heroes who were hailed as the hope of humanity. Each of them was strong enough to be said to equal the Vampire Princess Benethnasch, and they had in fact killed the Dragon King Ladon in the past.

“So one of these days, I want to make a country where elves can live out in the open. Not some cramped, deep forest, but someplace resplendent and urban. I want to prove that elves can do well even in such a place.”

Megrez had originally been a young and reckless man who’d flown the coop because of his doubts on how elves lived. And he was now a hero, so really anything could happen. His dream was to someday create a large country for elves.

“Ohhh, way to dream big!”

“Ha ha ha! You can definitely talk big! Good, men have to have big dreams!”

Mizar and Alioth laughed and downed their cheap beers as they listened to Megrez. The beer wasn’t great, but strangely enough, they liked it. Now that they’d gained fame and fortune, they could afford better stuff, but they would always gather here at this dirty bar to talk about dumb things with friends, and oddly, they would always order this subpar beer.

That was when Lufas slammed her mug onto the table. As if competing with Megrez, she boldly stated her dream as well. “That’s too soft, Megrez! If your

dream is to found a country, then mine is to take over the world! I'll build a paradise where nobody has to fear the devilfolk with my own hands!"

The dream Lufas spoke up turned everyone silent for a moment, after which the entire table boiled over. Her dream was so big that everyone spit out their drinks laughing. Lufas's face turned beet red, and she raised her voice again. "Wh-What's so funny?! I'll tell you right now, I'm serious, got it?! I'll show you all one of these days!"

"Gya ha ha ha! Taking over the world? That's way too big, don't you think?! If you actually manage it, I'll eat pasta through my nose!"

"You said it now, Alioth! No taking that back, got it?! Once I've conquered the world, you're definitely eating pasta through your nose! Ah, hey! Megrez, don't you laugh too!"

They were sharing dreams like children, but dreams were dreams because they weren't real. Unfortunately, they all had power and more fame than any adventurer would normally have, so could what they talked about here truly be called dreams? Later, Megrez would look back to this moment and say, "If only they had stayed dreams." It would have been best if their childish dreams had never become reality.

It was ten months after their fight with the Dragon King Ladon and half a year since they'd met Merak. After that, Lufas and her party continued advancing like the surging tide, and now they were regular household names. They'd exterminated dragons from human territories, eliminated giants, chased out dinosaurs, and massacred orcs and goblins. Even though times were dark with the continuing threat of the devilfolk—no, *because* of the continuing threat—the existence of heroes like them was a bright, unignorable light. That was why this turning point was only natural when it happened.

"Ah, there you guys are. May I sit?"

Right before Lufas was about to seriously explode from everyone's teasing, a single man appeared, stopping their teasing for now as they turned to face him. The man was well-known to all of them.

"If it isn't Captain Alphecca. Why're you here?"

“It’s been a beary long time.”

The man’s name was Alphecca William. He was a warrior who had once been entrusted with an entire fortress by the Crown Empire, and he’d been Phecda and Dubhe’s superior before they’d become adventurers. Originally, the two of them had been soldiers who served under Alphecca, but after Lufas had dealt with the threat to their country in the form of the Dragon King Ladon, they’d taken that chance to quit being soldiers and joined up with Lufas and her group.

“To me, it’s more surprising that the heroes of my country are drinking cheap swill in a rundown bar like this. Thanks to that, it took far more work to find you...” Alphecca admitted. “I was completely convinced that you’d be in an expensive place, so I spent the past few days combing through them.”

This bar was by no means good. Only beginner adventurers would probably be caught drinking in a bar like this. It was only natural for people to want to drink better stuff once they’d gotten the money to do so, and it was just as natural to want to drink in a nicer place in general. That was why Alphecca had been searching around the more expensive bars for the past few days, given his knowledge of the status of their wallets.

“Do you need us for something?”

“I do. Our king has a special request for all of you.”

Alphecca retrieved a couple of pages of paper and put them on the table. The fact that they had been personally requested for this meant that normal soldiers wouldn’t cut it. Knowing that, Lufas and the others took a look at the papers detailing their quest, and eventually, all of them had turned towards Alphecca with a look that said that they doubted his sanity.

“Did King Borealis go crazy or something?” asked Megrez.

“You really don’t hold back, do you?”

What Megrez said could have been taken as rude... Well, it was, in fact, rude, but Alphecca just gave a strained laugh.

The reason they were allowed to say such things was because they were the heroes who the Crown Empire owed its entire continued existence to. If it weren’t for that, it wouldn’t have been strange if Megrez was arrested for lèse-

majesté. However, Alphecca understood why Megrez would want to say something so rude. In truth, what was being requested of them warranted such a reaction.

“Hey now, you’ve gotta be kidding us. I get wanting to found a new country in a place that’s been cleared of monsters...” Alioth paused for a moment. “But wanting one of us to rule it? You realize we’re just adventurers.”

Everyone else nodded in agreement with Alioth.

Yes, of all things, the request was to become the new rulers of a country that was about to be founded. And that wasn’t all. Not only would the Crown Empire support them on all fronts but, as soon as their country was off the ground, the Crown Empire would actually join them as a vassal state. The contents of the paper were so ridiculous they could only be thought of as a joke.

Thanks to the Dragon King, the Crown Empire had declined greatly from its former glory. However, they were still the world’s largest human empire. The declaration that they would bend the knee unconditionally to a new country just didn’t sound like it came from a sane mind.

“Are you sure...that whoever wrote this didn’t make a writing mistake somewhere? I’m betting that this should read that the new country we found would become a vassal state under the Crown Empire.”

Megrez had quickly come to the conclusion that this was a simple clerical error, which was a very reasonable thought to have. *Even if there was a mistake in writing, that would still be plenty ridiculous, but it’s still much better than what’s actually written on here. Please, just be a mistake.*

However, Alphecca shook his head, and not vertically. He shook his head horizontally. “Unfortunately, what you’re reading is correct. Our king wants to become a vassal of your country.”

“Seriously?”

“Seriously. As you might expect, the ministers tried to stop him, but... Well, it seems he’s quite enamored with all of you. According to him, heroes will be needed in this age. He also says that heroes shouldn’t be bound by things like countries, and they shouldn’t be hindered by mundane things like conflicts over

power. In fact, he thinks that heroes should be the rulers and that they should unite the world to stand against the devilfolk as one... He sounded very passionate as he argued for it.”

Alphecca smiled with a troubled look as he talked. However, Alphecca himself seemed somewhat excited about this unprecedented country-founding plan. Rather, if he objected at all, he wouldn’t have been the one to bring them the papers.

“It’s your fault, you know, Lufas. You’re the one that lit a fire under our king.”

“Lit a fire...?”

“You remember, don’t you? Back when you guys left the country.”

Alphecca’s words had Lufas scratching her head. When Lufas had left the Crown Empire, she’d done so after creating an uproar. During the Dragon King’s attack, Emperor Borealis seemed like a shriveled-up old man. There was nothing resembling the vigor or presence a ruler should have had. However, after seeing Lufas and her party wreak havoc, he seemed to have come to some sort of realization. Right before Lufas left the country, Borealis requested to fight her.

The result: Lufas won handily. Instead of trying to be nice and letting him win because he was the king of a country, Lufas simply punched the old ruler and claimed victory. Just what had she been thinking? Of course, such an act was the height of insolence. It wouldn’t have been strange if she’d been captured on the spot and put to death. But Lufas and her group were the saviors of the country, so no one even tried that. Not to mention, the emperor himself had forbidden it. With that, Lufas and her group put the Crown Empire behind them. The end to their heroic tale was, “The king picked a fight, so she punched him good.”

It was an awful ending. However, this tale had a sequel.

“Apparently, our king was impressed by your power... Now he’s a true believer in strength. He’s so old already, but he continues to train every single day. I’d heard he used to be a famous Grappler, so I’m not sure if his young blood just came back to him or...” Alphecca sounded tired as he gave another laugh.

He had surely been run ragged by his hot-blooded ruler. That was quite a change from the exhausted husk that Lufas and the others had met before.

“So he wants to join under you guys, but that means that first, you all need to be rulers, or so he said. And now, here we are.”

“That emperor, is he an idiot?” Merak spat, his words harsh.

As another member of royalty, Merak just couldn't understand what Borealis was even thinking. Rather, he had the feeling that if he did, that would be the end of him as royalty.

“So what do you think, cap?” asked Phecda.

“Me...?” Alphecca hesitated a little in answering, but in the end, he clearly stated what side he was on. “Well, honestly, I'm on board with it.”

He knew full well that what his country was doing was considered impossible. Placing an adventurer on the throne and then bending the knee to them to become a vassal state... It was unprecedented, and that was only natural. However, thanks to his experience on the front lines of a war, Alphecca knew full well how necessary a strong ruler was.

“When I met all of you... That was also the day I first saw a real dragon. Back then, I was forced to come to the painful realization that in front of the strength of one overwhelming individual, entire countries or sheer numbers mean almost nothing. I knew in my soul that we needed a hero, and not just any hero either. With just any regular old hero, idiots blinded by greed and their own authority will try to absorb that person into their own forces, hampering their ability to do anything. What's actually needed is someone who can even roll those idiots up, a hero who can even control the greedy. Yes... Just like the Vampire Princess Benetnasch.”

The Vampire Princess Benetnasch... She was the strongest humanity had to offer, the queen of the vampires who ruled over the next largest area after the Crown Empire. Now that the Crown Empire had declined, Benetnasch's state might actually have been the largest.

But that wasn't all. Originally, the Crown Empire had been called the greatest of humanity's countries because of its territory size and overall population, but

in terms of stability, the country that Benetnasch ruled over was far better. Even now, she presided over the only country above ground where humanity was not threatened by anything. In her territory, one didn't need to be afraid of the devilfolk nor did they have to fear monsters. Benetnasch herself had eradicated every single one of them, building peace herself out of a mountain of bodies.

Unfortunately, she wasn't the type to hold any ideals like helping the weak, meaning she had no desire to make the world more peaceful. That was why she didn't even try to form friendships or alliances with other countries. If she were to have desired to save the world, she could have actually been this world's savior... That was what everyone had thought.

"The Vampire Princess, huh...?"

After hearing that name, Lufas got a faraway look in her eyes. Benetnasch was the symbol of strength, one whom she'd never met. To Lufas, that might have been a special name.

Seeing her like that, Alphecca seemed somewhat confused, so he hesitantly asked, "What? Do you know her or something...?"

"No, we've never met. She probably doesn't know anything about me."

Yeah, I'm sure the Vampire Princess knows nothing about us. She probably thinks of us as nothing more than faces among the masses. She's always just been a goal I've been aiming for. I might now be above her in level, but even still, I don't feel like I've managed to reach her.

After a moment, Lufas added, "I just admire her. To me, she's my ideal."

Lufas wanted a world where the weak wouldn't be oppressed. She dreamed of a future where people could live their lives unafraid of devilfolk or monsters. That was why she admired Benetnasch and set the Vampire Princess as her goal. To Lufas, Benetnasch was the manifestation of her dreams.

Benetnasch was strong, and she used that strength to build a nation where its citizens didn't have to fear their enemies. *I still haven't caught up to that image.*

"Will you wait a little for our answer? I want to discuss this with everyone."

“Understood. I’ll be staying here in Ydalir until I get your answer, so once you arrive at one, tell me. I’m staying at the traveler’s inn off the main street.”

Alphecca had probably predicted Lufas’s answer. After all, there was no way an adventurer would be prepared for such a big event as suddenly becoming a king. He never thought he’d get a quick answer anyway, so Alphecca didn’t try to hurry them. Instead, he left. It was a gesture of consideration, since, by his estimation, they wouldn’t be able to discuss openly with him around.

After making sure that Alphecca had left, Dubhe spoke. “So... What do we do? Somehow our dreams came running to us instead of the other way around.”

“You forgot your tic, Dubhe,” said Phecda. “Well, I get how you feel though.”

Dubhe seemed calm, but even he was probably excited by this. Normally, he would insert bear puns in his speech as a verbal tic to make himself stand out, but he forgot that this time. It was a sign that he was rather flustered on the inside. When that was pointed out by Phecda, Dubhe simply added a “bear” out of nowhere.

“You said you wanted to make a country for elves, didn’t you, Megrez?” For a moment, there was only silence. “Isn’t this the perfect chance?”

“No, well, I did say that, but...”

Megrez had just recently been talking about his dreams. He had certainly said that he wanted to form his own country. Lufas had also talked passionately about wanting to rule the world, but that didn’t mean she thought it would happen so soon. These were all dreams spoken under the influence of alcohol... They were dreams because they were far-off past the horizon. But now, those dreams had become infinitely closer to reality; their dreams had come over to them and were now in reach. Because of that, it was only natural to hesitate.

However, unlike Megrez, who was hesitating, Lufas looked upon it as the perfect chance.

Finally, Lufas said, “I want to accept it. I was a little hesitant at first, but this is a stroke of luck. It was looking like it would take decades or even centuries to fulfill, but the future has come to us now. We have to accept.”

Lufas was serious. What she just said was in no way just embellished talk

under the influence of alcohol. It was true that she was incited into saying what she'd said by a sense of rivalry to Megrez, but it was a dream she'd always held in her heart. Dreams were dreams because they never came true. She knew that, which was exactly why she'd started speaking the way she did. This time, their dreams had come to them, so why let the chance go?

The others could probably tell that Lufas was serious about this from the way she was acting. They looked at her with strained expressions.

"Oh yeah, you were raving about how the world was strange even when I first met you."

"I was. From the day I first met you, I always... No, I started even before that. I've always been aiming for a world without fear caused by the devilfolk or monsters."

Lufas had spoken about it in the past. She'd said that the world was wrong and that she wanted to change it. In order to do that, she needed strength; she even said that level 1000 was only the starting line. Everything she did was in order to transform her dream—something that, until now, had existed only past the far-off horizon—into a reality.

"Do you have any sort of reason to be trying to do that?" Mizar asked, his container of booze still in hand.

The air was filled with an unprecedented sense of tension, enough to make even Mizar, ever the heavy drinker, forget his booze.

Lufas simply smiled in response. "There's no really great reason. When I was little, a monster managed to get inside Vanaheim. It wasn't all that strong either, just a scout sent in by a devilfolk with Monster Tamer abilities. If I was as strong then as I am now, I could've killed it in the time it would take me to blink."

The first thing Alioth thought when hearing that was, *Is there any monster in the world that could survive longer than Lufas could blink?* He didn't say that out loud, however, a sign that he was at least somewhat able to read a room. Instead, Alioth waited for Lufas to continue.

"There's bearylly any monster in the world that could survive long enough for a

blink against Lufas.”

Shut up, bear! The rest of the party all glared at Dubhe in unison, while Lufas continued with only a strained smile as a reaction.

“Well, in essence, they were basically the kind of weak monster you could find anywhere. However, they weren’t so weak to the me back then. It’s pathetic, but I was so afraid of them I hid in a storage shed and held my breath while I shivered.”

A scared and hiding Lufas was something no one could imagine if they knew her as she was currently. The party had seen monsters shivering in fear of Lufas many times, but it was almost impossible for them to even imagine the opposite. The best Alioth’s admittedly lacking brain could manage was to imagine a young Lufas pretending to shiver in order to lure monsters in.

“The monster itself was chased off by soldiers, but in a stroke of bad luck, our house had been attacked. My father, who had apparently tried to use my mother as bait, was basically eaten to death. Several servants also died, and my mother suffered severe wounds. Ironically, I was never allowed in the house, which saved me.”

Lufas had casually revealed some incredibly dark facts about her past, which turned the mood gloomy. Merak, who knew of how prevalent white-wing supremacy was among the heaven-winged, averted his eyes awkwardly. He never even knew such an event had happened; such a small event as a monster getting in and killing some people before getting chased out by soldiers was something that would never reach the ears of a prince.

“My mother’s life was saved, but ever since then, she developed a phobia of the outside... Most of all, I blamed myself for being so weak that all I could do was shake in fear of the monster. I was scared because I was weak. I was weak, so there was nothing I could do. I very much wished to change myself.”

Lufas narrowed her eyes as she thought back to her weak past before gulping down some booze.

“However, humanity is weak. A single person can’t even beat a somewhat strong monster, let alone a devilfolk. And if they happen to have levels in the triple digits, then that’s just it. It won’t even be a fight. I lost hope when I

realized just how weak humanity was.”

The gap between humanity and monsters or devilfolk was hopelessly large. All humans were born at level 1. Every single person started weak. A person would need to train to become strong; they needed to survive actual battle. However, for any piece of strength a human could grab a hold of, a monster would already be there from birth. Even devilfolk didn't find it rare for them to appear with levels already in the triple digits. That was just incredibly unfair. Monsters and devilfolk managed to be born into the tiers of strength that humans would have to pour blood, sweat, and tears into achieving.

“But that was when I learned of the Vampire Princess. To me, she was like a ray of light in the darkness. She proved that it was possible for humanity. I learned of her territory and admired her way of life. You all know what happened after that. I started adventuring, and now, here I am.”

That was it. With that, Lufas stopped talking.

* *

That day, Lufas visited Vanaheim by herself. The group had already decided to accept Borealis's proposal, but before that, Lufas wanted to revisit her roots once.

There was a part of Lufas that was still unsure whether or not they were going down the right path. *Even the devilfolk have emotions. They're alive.* Lufas's ideals would mean killing them all in order to achieve peace, and there was a shadow of doubt within her, asking whether or not such a thing was right.

Just the other day, Lufas had let a devilfolk that was begging for his life as he ran away go just because he seemed young. She just...didn't chase him. *That's no good... Hesitation, pity, mercy... I won't be able to reach my ideal if I leave those feelings inside me.* That was why Lufas had steeled herself and come back to Vanaheim.

“Vanaheim, huh? That mountain path sure is harsh.”

While Lufas was relaxing in an inn near the foot of Vanaheim, the inn's proprietress spoke to her, sounding concerned. At the moment, Lufas was hiding her wings with some bandages so that no one could see her black

feathers. Thanks to that, Lufas looked completely human. That was probably why the proprietress was so worried. It was exceedingly difficult for anyone but heaven-winged to enter the mountainous city.

“Well, for today at least, you should just enjoy my food and build up your strength.”

“Mama’s cooking is real good! It’ll perk you right up, big sis!”

The proprietress seemed to have a daughter. It was obvious at a glance that they had a very loving relationship. The daughter trotted over to her father, who was a little ways away. When she reached him, her father gave her a ride on his shoulders, laughing warmly all the while. *What a nice family...* Lufas thought, before realizing that she was looking at them enviously. The ideal family relationship that Lufas had wanted in her childhood was being played out right in front of her. It only steeled Lufas’s resolve as she thought, *I have to make my ideals a reality in order to protect this family as well.*

A while after that, Lufas reached the church in Vanaheim. There was no way a cursed child with black wings would be welcomed in the church, but Lufas had her wings hidden, so the members of the church had no reason to doubt her. They simply welcomed her in as a traveler.

“Welcome, traveler. What would your business be with us this day?”

“I know a sick person here. I know I’m human, but may I be allowed to pass?”

“Be my guest. The Goddess of Love Alovenus welcomes all.”

All? Don’t make me laugh. You wouldn’t let in your so-called cursed children. Lufas kept those words locked tight in her chest as she entered.

The sick and wounded were being accommodated in the rear of the church. Lufas’s mother was also there. There was no hospital in Vanaheim. In exchange, those who used healing heaven-arts gathered at the church in order to heal those who needed it. There were several rooms in the church, and Lufas unerringly chose one to enter. This place... It was where people put those with wounds of the heart. This was where Lufas’s mother was staying. Her hair, which was the same golden shade as Lufas’s, had tinges of white now, and her once beautiful face had thinned, stripping away a lot of that past attractiveness.

Her arms were just skin and bones, and her face was pale, like a corpse's.

When she spotted Lufas, she started speaking with eyes that didn't seem to be able to settle on anything. "Oh my, what pretty hair you have. It's just like Lufas's... I bet if you two stood next to each other, you'd look just like sisters."

Her statement was off. The woman should have been Lufas's mother, but she didn't recognize her own daughter. True, Lufas was disguised. However, her disguise was literally just hiding her wings. Lufas's face was in full view, as was her unique hair. It would only be natural for people not to remember her face, given how she was persecuted as a cursed child and how people wouldn't even look at her. However, Lufas was in front of her mother. Her mother should know her face, but she didn't recognize Lufas.

"Come on, Lufas, take a look. This person has your hair. Hee hee, oh dad. You don't have to say it out loud. We already know our daughter's the best!"

She was seeing something that Lufas couldn't. It was a phantom of Lufas, one who stood still in time and was still a child. There was also an illusion of her husband, an impossible one who actually loved and doted on their daughter. The happy family she wished for was something only she could see. Even though her real daughter was right in front of her, the mother could not recognize that.

For a moment, Lufas couldn't speak, but then she said, "Yeah, I remember now. You all get along so well, don't you?"

Lufas played along with her mother and forced a smile onto her face. Since that day when she was attacked by the monster, Lufas's mother had lost her heart. Though her life was just barely spared, she broke under the fear of being suddenly attacked. Seeing her husband and the house's servants being slaughtered in front of her eyes had changed her. She had turned her eyes away from reality and pretended such a tragedy had never happened, thus gaining a happy life of her own making. She was seeing a waking dream.

If only the devilfolk didn't exist... Lufas couldn't help but think every time she saw her mother. That's right. I should never forget this anger, this sadness. My mother doesn't have much longer. She'll probably die while still not recognizing her own daughter and averting her eyes from reality.

In Mizgarz, this kind of tragedy was not uncommon. You could find people with similar stories everywhere. Such was the world of Mizgarz. *I find myself thinking, “Maybe my mom has regained her sense of self” every time I come here...*

Of course, such faint hopes would never be conveniently granted. In the end, Lufas never found her mother’s recognition. The commonness of this story meant that such stories were a normal occurrence; tragedies were abundant in this world. If, for example, the inn that Lufas stayed in before coming had been attacked and destroyed by devilfolk, that wouldn’t have been strange or unusual at all.

After leaving Vanaheim, Lufas paid witness to just such a common tragedy. The village, its livestock, the people, and the buildings—even the warm and loving family running the inn—were all brutally killed or destroyed. This might sound repetitive, but none of this was unusual. Mizgarz was a place that overflowed with despair.

However, Lufas’s heart was only filled with regret. When Lufas saw the disastrous state of the village after descending the mountain, she immediately ran for the inn. There, she saw a devilfolk boy, soaked in blood splatter. It was the boy that Lufas had let go several days before, the one who had been begging for their life.

“I was... I was a fool.”

“Sh-Shabe... Shabe me...”

While gripping the devilfolk boy by the neck, Lufas muttered to herself emotionlessly.

As I suspected, I mustn’t be soft if I’m to reach my ideals. If I’d chased him down and killed him back then, this wouldn’t have happened. Both the inn and the family would have surely still been full of smiles. But now, that’s been lost forever... All because I showed weakness.

“Yeah, right. I knew this already. There’s no need to show pity to the enemy. If I let them go, that just gives them a chance for revenge. Hesitation grows openings, and mercy will see no end to this.”

“P-Pleas— Shabe...”

“Shut up.”

Lufas clenched her fist, using her grip strength alone to wring the devilfolk boy's neck.

If I half-ass things, that will just give them a chance to retaliate. If I allow retaliation, then it's the innocents who will pay. I need to be cold blooded. I need to be merciless. I should be the devilfolk to the devilfolk. If not, then things like this will simply continue on forever. In order to stop that, someone has to harden their heart. Someone has to become a demon. This was something I already knew, something I've resolved to do. After all, isn't that why I chased after power, so that I could build peace out of a mountain of bodies and rivers of blood just like the Vampire Princess? But even then, I was still soft. I allowed myself to have a heart. That's why innocent blood was spilled once again today.

Okay. My heart has been steeled. I will no longer waver. I will kill every single devilfolk in Mizgarz.

That day, Lufas Mapphaahl stopped chasing after dreams. Her dreams became reality, and she became a demon.



* *

One year later.

It was like a scene from hell. Blood, blood, blood as far as the eye could see. All that blood formed rivers in the dirt, streaming away from a veritable mountain of bodies. Each and every one of them was beheaded, and the heads were displayed on top of spears stuck out of the ground. Every single one of these heads and corpses belonged to a devilfolk, and they contained all sorts. Women, children, the elderly—none of them had been spared.

“Lufas Maphaahl, my great master. Every single one of these posers that live in the area has been given death.”

“Well done, Aigokeros.”

The only living beings present at the center of this scene from hell were Lufas, who had become a ruler, and Aigokeros, the great demon beside her, who was soaked in blood splatter.

Megrez and the others couldn't help but experience a cold sweat, seeing their changed friend.

Megrez hesitated before speaking. “Don't you think you've gone too far, Lufas? No matter how you consider it, displaying the corpses like this is...”

“If we continue to half-ass things, it will just lead to anger. That anger will change to hatred, and hatred will become motivation for revenge. That must not happen. If we want peace for the people, we must rip out their will to fight from the roots. We must instill them with such fear that there will no longer be any room for hatred... They must tremble just by hearing my name and become unable to move because of it.”

Seeing the look in Lufas's eye, Megrez couldn't help but feel fear. All he could see in them was merciless, bottomless anger. *I'm like this, and I'm her friend. I'm sure the fear the devilfolk feel is incomparable.* Megrez shivered.

“B-But you didn't have to even make an example out of the women and children too... I'm not telling you not to kill them, but...”

“You’re wrong, Megrez. These are simply their female and immature forms. They are not women and children.”

Lufas no longer thought of the devilfolk as even being similar to humans. To her, they were nothing more than vermin to be stamped out.

A golem that looked like a maid stepped towards Lufas with heavy footsteps. She had a devilfolk girl who was trembling in fear in her hands.

“Master, by my count, there were not enough bodies, so after some searching, I have found a survivor. Should I dispose of her like the other devilfolk?”

“Yes. Well done.”

The steel maid dragged off the girl, who, at this point, was repeating the phrase, “Help me,” over and over again. Soon, her head would join the others on top of the spears. The heads being lined up right now belonged to devilfolk who had established a country here in this land. The girl just now was the last survivor, and she was now screaming her last.

“Lufas... Is this really what you wanted to do?”

“It is. No matter what I have to do, I will build a world in which people can live in peace. I will allow them to make fond memories, to sleep at night without fear, and to hold hope and face the future together... To realize that, I don’t mind if I become the greatest perpetrator of genocide in history. I can be a demon, one who is feared for eternity.”

Megrez couldn’t stop the shivers he got when he looked at his changed friend.

What Lufas was aiming for was something every person dreamt of at least once. A peaceful world with no fear of the devilfolk... There was no one who didn’t want that. However, in order to achieve such a nice future, the one who made it happen couldn’t afford to stay as nice as the future they wanted. If a person wanted to make that future happen, they would have to dirty their hands far more than anyone else. Lufas had resolved to do just that. That was why she could no longer be stopped.

I get what she’s saying, and it’s probably necessary. But... It’s also terrifying.

I'm terrified of Lufas. Will her fangs be pointed at humanity one of these days? Maybe it would be better for me, as a friend, to...take her down before it ever happens...

Megrez stopped his train of thought there as a chill ran up his spine. ...*Wh- What was I just considering? Take down? Who? Lufas Maphaahl, my friend?! No way... What was I thinking just now... Lufas is acting for the sake of humanity's future. Someone has to do it, so that's why she's taking it upon herself. Take her down? I think I'm going crazy.* Megrez shook his head in an attempt to rid himself of the scary idea that had popped into his head.

However, his fear, his doubt towards Lufas was now stuck inside him. It would not disappear. *One day, she may destroy humanity.* Once that thought had occurred to him, Megrez could not get rid of it.

And Megrez wasn't the only one. Alioth and Mizar also had doubt bloom in their hearts. As of now, it was just a small amount of doubt. However, while it was just a seed, it was surely growing within their hearts, steadily becoming bigger.

Once, they'd laughed with each other while talking about dreams. When they talked, they were full of smiles. However, now that their dreams were becoming real, there were no smiles among them.

Afterword

Thank you for picking up *A Wild Last Boss Appeared!* volume 7. I am the author, Firehead. I seem to remember saying that this series would end with volume 6 or 7 before, but it's not over yet.

Now then, Dina was pretty much the main character this time around. How did you all feel about that? Up until now, she's been completely treated as a no-presence background character who's full-blown suspicious, but now, the lid's been blown wide open, and she's turned out to be Lufas's greatest supporter and quite the hard worker.

Honestly, Dina is the one who works the hardest not only among the Twelve Stars but among all the characters who appear throughout the story. It wouldn't be going too far to say that the entire story of *A Wild Last Boss Appeared!* has been the story of Dina trying to awaken Lufas in her full and complete state. Of course, it would've been possible to immediately awaken Lufas, but then she would've been forced to reckon with the ouroboroses and the Goddess while lacking proper military strength. So, Dina was forced to deceive the Goddess while gathering up the disparate pieces.

First, let's count up everything Dina has accomplished.

- She joined the Seven Heroes on the eve of Lufas's downfall and participated in the sealing of Lufas. When this happened, she managed to seal Lufas using Exgate. The reason this worked when going through an Exgate, which would normally require express permission and trust, was because Dina had been collaborating with Lufas the entire time.
- She taught Lufas how to make an avatar in total secrecy.
- She pretended to be a spy for the Goddess, thus gaining the ability to use Sol as a cover to infiltrate the devilfolk. She named herself Venus and with that cover identity, she controlled the devilfolk from the shadows in order to prevent humanity from being destroyed before Lufas's revival. Sol thought he was using Dina as cover, but that actually went both ways.

- She contacted the Devil King, and they formed a secret alliance to take down the Goddess.
- She frequently traveled to Japan and managed to create a company there. With the company, she created *Exgate Online* and used the game to pass information to Lufas's avatar, which meant that the cause of the release of such a shit game was entirely her fault and not the Goddess's. However, because of the time needed to feed the avatar information, a blind spot was created, and Dina completely overlooked the issue of Parthenos's age.
- She pretended to be on board with the Goddess's Scenario and used her plan to copy Lufas's avatar's personality and memories back onto Lufas herself.
- Then, she returned Lufas's real body. The Goddess thought she'd overwritten Lufas with an easy-to-manipulate personality, but it was actually Lufas herself who was acting like someone else. (Though the person themselves had no idea they were acting.)
- After that, Dina pretended to be Lufas's advisor and made sure to stick out her tail just enough that Lufas could not ignore it and had to doubt her. In doing so, Lufas slowly but surely started to doubt the Goddess as well, which brought her closer and closer to the original Lufas.
- She indirectly manipulated Lufas's actions and had Lufas collect the Twelve Stars.
- She acted flashily among the devilfolk, causing her to be kicked out by Terra, thus allowing her to escape Sol's notice and gain freedom in a natural way.
- She used Pollux to leave Lufas's side. With that, it looked to the Goddess like her spy got found out, causing her to run out of fear, so Dina was still considered on the Goddess's side.
- By taking advantage of an opening made by the cornered Goddess concentrating on Mizgarz, Dina managed to get to Earth. Then, she led Lufas to her side, allowing her to tell Lufas the truth on Earth, away from the Goddess's prying eyes.

Well, this is about it.

The fact that humanity had yet to be destroyed in these last two hundred years, that a member of the Twelve Stars always conveniently showed up wherever Lufas went, that the devilfolk carelessly let too many of their leaders die, that the Goddess had yet to seriously take action, and that my allergies are really hard to deal with, all of that was Dina's fault. I'm in there too, though.

Other than Dina, Aigokeros also finally managed to strut his stuff. Up until now, he's wallowed in a sort of undefined role, but now it feels like he's finally managed to show his true form as the evil lord of demons. As was revealed in the volume, Aigokeros gets really dangerous when he tries. He's incredibly strong. As for how strong, he would be strong enough to defeat an unawakened Lufas.

Now, you might be wondering what is up with the wicked god who fought on par with him, and I can only say that he's another bugged character on par with Aigokeros. Lufas, Benetnasch, Aigokeros, and Thulhu can probably be considered the Four Heavenly Kings of Mizgarz's broken characters.

However, I can't help but get the feeling that because of their little rampage, Eros and Aquarius stood out less, even though it was their debut. Well, it's also true that the timing of their debut was a little bad. They joined just before the final battle, and they don't offer too much extra might. If this were a game, they'd be immediately benched. Not to mention the fact that they were both the same element.

As a word of support, the two of them aren't weak. In pure might, Eros equals Libra, and Aquarius is great in the support role. If they'd appeared earlier, they would have had more than enough strength to run absolutely buck wild. However, Leon was more adept in the role of close combat, and as a support character, either Parthenos or an awakened Libra would be better... So since the two of them joined after the strongest characters for both long-and close-range combat had already come... How should I put it...? They're a little pitiable.

They may have that disappointing aspect that you see a lot in games, but at the very least, I can assure you that the two of them will have their chance to shine in the next volume.

Now then, with this, Dina's job is done. The only enemies left are Sol, the Devil King, the ouroboroses, and the Goddess. All of them are extremely strong enemies, so in the next volume, Mr. Inflation will have to work overtime. No breaks allowed.

All right then, let's meet again in the next volume.

Stop! If you start a battle with all the remaining strong characters, Mr. Inflation will burn out and die! He's already on the verge of it from all the overtime! Please, don't die, Mr. Inflation! If you fall here, what will happen to your promise with Mr. Laws of Physics and Mr. Common Sense? You still have HP. If you can make it through here, you can win against this ridiculous series!

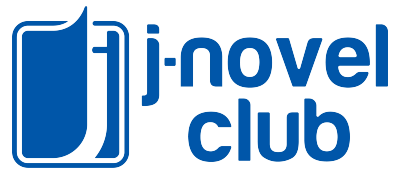
Next time: *Mr. Inflation Dies*. Stand by for volume 8!

-Firehead



I finally get to actually draw Dina again.
This is me trying to figure out
the cover art lol.

Yahako



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A Wild Last Boss Appeared! Volume 7

by Firehead

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